

Fukushima-is-still-news

- vol. 7 -

**Practical Problems
For The Japanese Population
2012-2014**



Odile Girard



Référence bibliographique

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INTRODUCTION

J'ai « découvert » l'écologie au début des années 70, croisant dans le même temps la pollution, les luttes paysannes et la malbouffe, la médecine qui avait (déjà) perdu son âme, les mouvements sociaux et bien sûr le nucléaire qui a occupé une grande partie de ma vie.

Après la catastrophe de mars 2011 au Japon, j'ai suivi chaque jour une partie des grands journaux japonais anglophones pour essayer de sauvegarder un maximum d'articles ayant trait à Fukushima. L'idée était de conserver une sorte d'archive accessible à tous, qu'ils soient écrivains, journalistes ou tout simplement intéressés.

Le blog « [Fukushima-is-still-news](http://fukushima-is-still-news.com) » a été poursuivi jusqu'en 2019. Ci-dessous, la conclusion parue le jour où j'ai décidé d'arrêter mon blog.

End of March 2019: Time to stop this blog

29 Mars 2019

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I have been collecting and spreading information on the Fukushima disaster for more than 8 years.

More than ever I am convinced that the name of my blog « Fukushima-is-still-news » was aptly chosen. Or perhaps I should have called it « Fukushima should still be news ». What I'm getting at is that I know the disaster is going on and we cannot simply forget Fukushima and turn the page. But the mode of action I chose 8 years ago has its limits and it is time for me to stop this blog.

I don't want the contents to be lost, so I will try and publish the lot with the Éditions de Fukushima so that the information remains available online.

Good bye for now. I am not doing a disappearing act. I'm still there tracking what's going on in the world of nukes.

C'est maintenant chose faite. Le blog *fukushima-is-still-news* est désormais disponible aux Éditions de Fukushima. Une fois de plus merci à mon ami Pierre, qui m'a convaincue à l'époque de tenir ce blog et m'a aidée à le lancer.

Odile Girard

Avertissement

La mise en page de dizaines de milliers de pages étant trop fastidieuse, nous avons préféré dans un premier temps éditer les volumes 7 à 16 sans mise en page particulière plutôt que de risquer de ne jamais les éditer. Chacun de ces livres est donc, dans la version présente, constitué des articles du blog copiés de manière brute. Les articles sont disposés a priori chronologiquement. Nous nous excusons donc pour l'absence de table des matières. La recherche peut toutefois facilement être effectuée par mot clé avec la fonction CTRL + F

Le présent volume est le septième d'une collection de 16 ouvrages qui sont édités petit à petit.

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Japanese people update Feb 12, 2012

February 12,2012

Tokyo gov. opposes 'N-vote'

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120211003443.htm>

Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara has spoken against establishing an ordinance to hold a referendum among residents of the capital on whether the operation of nuclear power plants should be allowed.

"It's impossible to create such an ordinance, and I have no intention of doing so," Ishihara said during a regular press conference Friday.

Ishihara's comments came as it appeared likely a citizens advocacy group that aims to bring about the referendum in Tokyo would succeed in its campaign to collect the number of signatures legally required to directly petition the metropolitan government to establish an ordinance.

The citizens group is called "Let's Decide Together/Citizen-initiated National Referendum on Nuclear Power."

Ishihara criticized activity against nuclear power, saying: "The most troublesome thing among humans is sentiment. Because Japanese have the trauma of atomic bombs, people speak [against nuclear power plants] out of fear.

"The progress of human beings has been achieved through their own development of technology, overcoming setbacks and failures."

If the group submits a direct petition for a referendum ordinance to the governor, Ishihara will have to submit a bill for the ordinance to the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly with his opinion attached.

The assembly will then deliberate whether to create such an ordinance.

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120212p2a00m0na007000c.html>

From atomic bombings to nuclear disaster: director turns camera toward Fukushima

Director Hidetaka Inazuka, known for his documentary on the late double atomic bomb survivor Tsutomu Yamaguchi, has turned his attention toward Fukushima Prefecture, covering the prefecture in a new film on people exposed to radiation from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The 61-year-old filmmaker's new work is titled "Fukushima 2011: Hibaku ni Sarasareta Hitobito no Kiroku" (Fukushima 2011: Records of people exposed to radiation). It follows survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who are now living in Fukushima, as well as the people facing radioactive contamination of their hometowns. The film is due to be screened across Japan from mid-March. It will also be shown at the Los Angeles Japanese Film Festival in April.

One subject of the new documentary is a man in his 80s who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima at an army barracks in the city.

"Even when there were explosions at the nuclear power plant I didn't feel scared. I've been hit by a bombing before, and it's 30 kilometers (from my place to the nuclear plant)," he says.

After the war, the man took up dairy farming, but the nuclear disaster triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami forced him to abandon his business.

"I had 46 cows, but I sold them off for 800,000 yen. I can get by for a year or two, but there's no telling what's in store after that. I think about my children and grandchildren every day," he tells the camera.

In April last year, Inazuka visited the United States for a screening of his documentary "Twice Bombed: A Legacy of Yamaguchi Tsutomu." The film traces Yamaguchi's activities speaking about surviving the atomic bombings of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yamaguchi died in 2010 at the age of 93. The documentary was well received in the United States, but after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japanese people in the U.S. complained that the effects of radiation were not being properly communicated in Japan.

Hearing such complaints, Inazuka recalled the words of Yamaguchi: "The world in which people live must be nuclear-free. We can't prevent (nuclear) accidents with current technology. If we don't become nuclear-free, the downfall of mankind will draw closer."

In May last year, Inazuka visited Fukushima Prefecture, and he focused his camera on the people in the municipality of Iitate before the whole village was evacuated, as well as on people in the city of Soma and other areas where many were killed by the March 11, 2011 tsunami. The film covers people's efforts to restore and revitalize their hometowns, where bonds between families and communities have been severed as a result of the disaster.

Included in the film is 69-year-old Hiromi Sato, a restaurant operator in the city of Minamisoma.

"My neighbors starting leaving, and everyone sent me emails saying 'get out of there' so I started to get scared," she says. "But I didn't want to live in a shelter." She reopened her restaurant after the "Golden Week" string of public holidays in May 2011.

"There are various circumstances among the people who stay, those who leave, and those who return," Inazuka says. "I want to cover the people who are confronting the issues of life wholeheartedly."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Nobel laureate, citizens call for abolition of nuclear power

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120212p2g00m0dm021000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An antinuclear civic group led by Nobel literature laureate Kenzaburo Oe and other celebrities held rallies in Tokyo and Niigata Prefecture on Saturday calling for the abolition of nuclear reactors in the aftermath of radiation leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Addressing the protesters gathered at Yoyogi Park in Tokyo, who numbered around 12,000, according to the organizers, Oe insisted on the abolishment of nuclear reactors.

"We will be handing nuclear waste generated from the nuclear reactors to our grandchildren. This is unethical conduct," Oe said.

The rallies were held as part of the group's campaign to collect 10 million signatures against nuclear power to submit it to the prime minister and the chiefs of both chambers of the Diet. The executive committee for the "10 Million People's Action to say Goodbye to Nuclear Power Plant" campaign said earlier it has gathered about 4 million signatures so far in sympathy with its goal to abolish all 54 commercial reactors in Japan.

Taro Yamamoto, an actor who is known as an anti-nuclear advocate, also took part in the rally.

"If a massive earthquake occurs now, our country will be finished. We cannot have the nuclear reactors resume their operations," he told the protesters.

On March 11, the first anniversary since the disastrous earthquake and tsunami prompted the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the group plans to hold a rally in Koriyama in Fukushima Prefecture.

February 11, 2012

Citizens group runs full-page anti-nuclear ad in Mainichi

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120211p2a00m0na004000c.html>

The ad carried in the Feb. 11 morning edition of the Mainichi Shimbun.

A citizens group formed by intellectuals Shinichi Nakazawa, Tatsuru Uchida, and writer Seiko Ito ran a full-page anti-nuclear power ad in the Feb. 11 edition of the Mainichi Shimbun.

The ad reads in large print, "We aim for a Japan with no nuclear power plants." Nakazawa says the ad "is valuable in that it makes the opinions of people below the surface (of public discourse) visible through newspapers."

The ad was endorsed by some 150 people, mainly musicians and others in the arts, as well as around 20 organizations.

"To be ethical towards the future, we have to change direction," says Ito.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

February 10, 2012

TEPCO has paid 229.2 billion yen in damages for nuclear crisis

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120210p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has paid approximately 229.2 billion yen in damages to victims so far, a company executive said.

As of Feb. 7, the company had received about 86,500 claims for compensation for financial losses the applicants say were caused by the nuclear disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 tsunami. The company has paid compensation to about 45,900 of the applicants -- about 30,000 individuals and 15,900 companies and other organizations -- through settlements, managing director Naomi Hirose told the government's nuclear crisis damage dispute examination panel on Feb. 9.

If compensation paid earlier by the utility as a provisional measure is included, the figure rises to some 370.5 billion yen.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Municipalities dissatisfied with gov't's rice-planting restriction: survey

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120210p2a00m0na011000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Of the 12 local municipalities where rice harvested in 2011 was found to have cesium levels that would prohibit them from planting rice this spring, 11 are critical of the government's stand, a Mainichi survey has found.

The national government's new radiation standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram is set to take effect in April. The current provisional limit is 500 becquerels per kilogram.

Over 100 becquerels of radioactive cesium per kilogram of rice has been found in 12 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. Eleven of these municipalities are dissatisfied with the planting restriction in districts where cesium levels fell between 100 and 500 becquerels per kilogram, and four are appealing for permission to plant rice in districts where cesium levels surpass the current provisional maximum of 500 becquerels per kilogram.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is set to incorporate the demands of various municipalities in drawing up planting regulations this month, but it appears reaching an agreement that will satisfy all parties will be difficult.

The agriculture ministry has already announced plans to restrict the 2012 planting of rice in districts where over 500 becquerels of radioactive cesium per kilogram of rice has been detected. As for areas where rice was found to have cesium levels between 100 and 500 becquerels per kilogram, the ministry is in talks with local municipalities to restrict planting in areas with large concentrations of farms exceeding 100 becquerels, and to permit planting in less concentrated areas.

Of the 12 municipalities affected and surveyed, the city of Nihonmatsu did not submit responses. The remaining 11 cities, towns and villages said they want planting to continue in areas where between 100 and 500 becquerels of cesium per kilogram of rice was found, citing farmers' diminishing motivation to work and deteriorating farm conditions as reasons to do so. "The population is quickly aging, and it wouldn't be practical for (the national government) to come back to us several years later and tell us we can start planting again," an Otama village official said.

With the exception of farms in the cities of Fukushima, Date and Nihonmatsu, where over 500 becquerels of cesium per kilogram of rice was detected, only a few farms in the remaining nine municipalities were found to have rice with over 100 becquerels of cesium per kilogram. In the village of Nishigo, only three of 483 farmers there harvested rice with over 100 becquerels per kilogram, with the maximum being 155 becquerels. Local officials believe that if farms are thoroughly decontaminated prior to planting, and once testing of all bags of rice begins as planned in fiscal 2012, the risks of any contaminated rice reaching the market can be avoided.

The cities of Fukushima and Date, along with the towns of Kawamata and Kunimi, said that planting should not be restricted for farms with rice exceeding 500 becquerels of cesium per kilogram. Fukushima city officials seek permission to grow rice for research purposes, while Date city officials emphasize that rice farmers live for rice cultivation, even if prices are lowered. Meanwhile, Kunimi officials stated that if rice planting is going to be restricted this year, "the national government should shoulder the burden of decontamination so that there is hope for 2013 and beyond."

In November 2011, rice harvested in the Onami district of the city of Fukushima was found to have more than the provisional permissible amount of radioactive cesium. Emergency tests were subsequently conducted on rice from 23,247 farms in 29 municipalities. Over 100 becquerels of cesium per kilogram of rice was found from some of the farms in 12 cities, towns, and villages.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

February 09, 2012

Govt asks Fukushima to restrict rice planting

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120208005350.htm>

FUKUSHIMA--The government has asked local municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture to refrain from planting rice this year in districts where radioactive cesium exceeding the government's new limit was found in last year's harvests, according to government sources.

The restriction applies to districts in which rice harvests cultivated in 2011 were found to contain 100 becquerels per kilogram or more of radioactive cesium.

Some of last year's harvests of unpolished rice in the prefecture were found to contain radioactive cesium exceeding the government's previous interim limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram.

Results of research by the prefectural government showed that rice harvests containing radioactive cesium over the new limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram were found in 583 farming households in 65 districts in 12 municipalities.

The prefectural government said about 59,000 farming households in 371 districts in 48 municipalities in the prefecture planted rice in 2011.

The research was conducted on 23,247 households in 151 districts in 29 municipalities in the prefecture. If the central government's plan is implemented, the restriction will likely be imposed on most of the districts, with a few exceptions.

The central government in December decided restrictions would be necessary if levels of radioactive cesium in harvests exceeded the interim limit.

For cases in which the amount of radiation exceeds the new limit, the central government said it would consult the prefectural and municipal governments.

Officials from the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry visited the Date city government office on Friday to brief Date officials on the restrictions on rice cultivation.

The ministry officials said the government wants to restrict rice planting in six districts where 500 becquerels per kilogram or more of radioactive cesium were detected, and six additional districts where between 100 becquerels and 500 becquerels were detected. The town comprises 21 districts.

But the officials also told the city government that the restriction may not be imposed in districts with levels of radioactive substances above the new limit if the number of questionable spots were limited and if there was clear evidence of a reduction in the quantity of radioactive cesium.

Based on such criteria, about 850 hectares, or **more than 60 percent, of all rice paddies in the city will be restricted from growing rice this year.**

However, in two affected districts, the detected levels exceeded the new limit in only one or two rice paddies, and the amount of excess cesium was limited.

An official of the ministry said the restriction would not apply to the two districts if it could be shown that "proper cultivation would prevent contamination [of the rice]."

The central government's policy was reported to the city's assembly on Tuesday.

Date Mayor Shoji Nishida opposed the restrictions, saying the city could not accept the central government's request. "The measure will rob farmers of their morale and increase the amount of unused farmland," the mayor said.

He indicated an intention to work with nearby municipal governments, including the Fukushima city government, to urge the central government to allow rice planting in all areas in the prefecture.

Ministry officials also visited the Kunimi town government in the prefecture on Friday. Kunimi officials said the ministry officials presented the plan to restrict rice cultivation in the town's districts where 100 becquerels or more of radioactive cesium were detected in last year's rice harvests. The ministry officials told the town government that in principle the restrictions would apply to those districts, and showed which ones would be subject to the curbs.

February 08, 2012

70% of nuclear reactor hosts cautious on restart

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120208_28.html

An NHK survey has found that more than 70 percent of Japanese municipalities that host nuclear power plants are cautious about restarting the reactors.

51 of Japan's 54 nuclear reactors are currently out of operation. Restarting them would require the approval of local municipalities.

NHK surveyed 29 municipalities, excluding those in Fukushima Prefecture.

5 of them, or 17 percent, said they would give the go-ahead for the reactors to resume operation. But 21 municipalities, or 72 percent, said they wouldn't allow it, or that they cannot yet decide.

Municipalities that expressed caution said they cannot be sure whether the reactors are really safe, and cited the difficulty of persuading residents while the government has yet to decide on its nuclear policy.

Asked what is needed beside stress tests to restart the reactors, 48 percent said a satisfactory investigation into the accident at Fukushima Daiichi plant, and understanding by local residents. 38 percent cited new government safety regulations.

The municipalities stressed their concern over reactor safety, and demanded more government accountability.

Child population drops in disaster-hit prefectures

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120208_05.html

The number of children has significantly decreased in 3 Japanese prefectures hit by the March 11th disaster.

The Education Ministry says the child population as of May 1st in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima fell by more than 27,000 from a year earlier to about 834,000.

Fukushima saw the biggest fall of 5.8 percent, or more than 17,000, followed by a decrease of 2.3 percent in Iwate and minus 1.7 percent in Miyagi.

The ministry says the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant is to blame for an 11-percent decline in the number of kindergarteners and a nearly 8-percent drop in the elementary school population in the prefecture.

It says smaller children are more vulnerable to radiation and are likely to have been evacuated to other prefectures.

The child population in the 3 prefectures had been falling even before the disaster due to the low birthrate.

February 06, 2012

1.5-fold rise eyed for nuke plant operators' payments to damages fund

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120206p2g00m0dm003000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government has decided on a plan to require that Japan's 12 nuclear power plant operators contribute a total of 150 billion yen annually from fiscal 2012 to a state-backed facility to help Tokyo Electric Power Co. meet huge compensation payments over the crisis at its Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, one and a half times the initially planned amount, sources familiar with the matter said Sunday.

The government will ask for larger contributions than previously sought because of growing calls for smooth compensation payments to victims of the crisis triggered by the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, the sources said.

The contribution program is intended to divide the burden from the Fukushima crisis among all nuclear reactor operators and covers nine of Japan's 10 electric power companies, excluding Okinawa Electric Power Co., which does not operate a nuclear power plant. The fund also covers Japan Atomic Power Co., Electric Power Development Co. and Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd.

The government will finalize details of the program, including the planned increase in contributions, by the end of fiscal 2011 to March 31.

Contributions by the 12 companies became mandatory with the establishment of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund on Sept. 12. For fiscal 2011, the 12 companies are required to contribute a total of just over 70 billion yen to the state-backed fund for the period since its establishment.

Tokyo Electric would contribute 50 billion yen to the fund annually, the highest among the 12 companies, starting in fiscal 2012, and Kansai Electric Power Co. would contribute the second-largest sum of 25.8 billion yen as it operates more nuclear plants than other utilities.

Other expected contributions include 13.8 billion yen from Kyushu Electric Power Co., 13.0 billion yen from Chubu Electric Power Co. and 8.7 billion yen from Tohoku Electric Power Co.

There is opposition among government officials to increasing contributions to the fund amid concern that utilities could be prompted to raise electricity charges, the sources said. But the government intends to go ahead with the increase, expecting that electricity charges will be held in check as the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is reviewing utilities' calculation of costs for setting power bills.

February 05, 2012

573 deaths 'related to nuclear crisis'

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120204003191.htm>

A total of 573 deaths have been certified as "disaster-related" by 13 municipalities affected by the crisis at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to a Yomiuri Shimbun survey.

This number could rise because certification for 29 people remains pending while further checks are conducted.

The 13 municipalities are three cities--Minami-Soma, Tamura and Iwaki--eight towns and villages in Futaba County--Namiie, Futaba, Okuma, Tomioka, Naraha, Hirono, Katsurao and Kawauchi--and Kawamata and Iitate, all in Fukushima Prefecture.

These municipalities are in the no-entry, emergency evacuation preparation or expanded evacuation zones around the nuclear plant, which suffered meltdowns soon after the March 11 disaster.

A disaster-related death certificate is issued when a death is not directly caused by a tragedy, but by fatigue or the aggravation of a chronic disease due to the disaster. If a municipality certifies the cause of death is directly associated to a disaster, a condolence grant is paid to the victim's family. If the person was a breadwinner, 5 million yen is paid.

Applications for certification have been filed for 748 people, and 634 of them have been cleared to undergo screening.

Of the 634, 573 deaths were certified as disaster-related, 28 applications were rejected, four cases had to reapply because of flawed paperwork, and 29 remain pending.

In Minami-Soma, a screening panel of doctors, lawyers and other experts examined 251 applications and approved 234 of them. The panel judged two deaths were not eligible for certification and 15 were put on hold.

"During our examination of the applications, we gave emphasis to the conditions at evacuation sites and how they spent their days before they died," a city government official said. "However, the screening process was difficult in cases when people had stayed in evacuation facilities for an extended time and when there was little evidence of where they had been taking shelter."

February 04, 2012

Survey: 2.3% of farmers produce rice above cesium safety standard

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201202040050

About 2.3 percent of farmers in Fukushima Prefecture yielded rice with radioactive cesium levels exceeding the government's new safety standard, according to prefectural government officials.

The new standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram will take effect in April, replacing the provisional standard of 500 becquerels per kg.

The results of the Fukushima prefectural government's emergency survey, released on Feb. 3, will be used by the central government to decide on areas where farming will be banned this year.

But farmers in areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are growing impatient with the central government's indecision on the matter. They are also worried that no one will buy their produce over fears of radiation contamination.

According to the survey, which covered about 23,000 rice-growing households in 29 cities, towns and villages, contamination levels exceeded the new standard in rice grown by 545 farmers in 12 municipalities, many of them in northern Fukushima Prefecture.

The survey also showed rice cultivated by 38 farmers in three cities had readings above 500 becquerels per kg.

Radiation levels in rice grown by 84.3 percent of farmers were below measurable limits, according to the survey.

The prefecture conducted the survey after radioactive cesium levels higher than the provisional standard were found in rice grown in the Onami district of Fukushima, the prefectural capital, in November.

The central government said it will prohibit the planting of seeds in areas that are heavily contaminated. But it has not decided which areas should face such restrictions under the new standard.

Agriculture minister Michihiko Kano said in a news conference on Feb. 3 that the government should not impose limits on planting.

“We should respect the feelings of farmers,” he said.

A farm ministry official also said the decision for this year would be extremely tough because the lines marking sections under restriction must be drawn within areas where contamination levels are publicized.

The government banned planting last year in areas from where residents had evacuated. But officials at municipalities have already announced plans to go ahead with planting this year, even in areas where contamination levels have exceeded the new limit.

The prefectural chapter of Japan Agricultural Co-operatives is seeking permission to plant in sections of areas where this year’s rice crop will likely clear the new safety standard. The chapter said rice paddies will be decontaminated and other measures taken before the planting starts.

The JA group is expected to forbid planting in areas where radiation levels are expected to remain above the safety limit.

In addition, the Fukushima city government is calling on the central government to permit the planting of rice crops that will be used for purposes other than for food.

“If farmers are not allowed to grow rice (this year), it will reduce their willingness to produce,” an official in the city’s agriculture section said. “Rice fields will also become run-down.”

The city governments of Date and Motomiya have already said they will allow farmers to grow rice, in principle, while requiring decontamination of their rice paddies.

However, decontamination work could cause a new problem for the farmers, according to local officials.

“If rice fields are dug up too deeply, they may not be fit for growing the crop with too many rocks turning up,” an official said.

The heavily contaminated village of Kawauchi, meanwhile, said it will not allow any planting.

Rice farmers are divided.

A 58-year-old farmer in Date said contamination levels found in his rice were up to slightly more than 100 becquerels per kg under the survey.

He has already ordered seeds and fertilizers for his rice crops this year.

“Unless I can plant this year, my rice paddies will be overrun with weeds,” he said. “The fields would not be restored to the original condition for five or 10 years.”

He said he is frustrated by the lack of any long-term perspective by authorities over his livelihood.

“Is (the restriction) for just this year or for many more years?” he said. “It would mean a lifetime if the restriction is put in place until there is no more cesium contamination.”

Saburo Watanabe, a farmer in Aizubange, where all rice crops were found to be safe, said planting should be banned in areas where contamination levels exceed the new safety standard. He said the image of rice grown in Fukushima Prefecture must be protected.

“Consumers tend to think all rice crops from Fukushima Prefecture are the same,” said Watanabe, 58, who cultivates rice in a 12-hectare field.

He said most of his rice from last year remained unsold.

A 56-year-old farmer in Nihonmatsu said, “I want to grow rice, but we will be in trouble with unsold rice if we push for it and face another bad result.”

The rice in his district in Nihonmatsu was found with contamination levels above the new limit.

(This article was written by Ryo Inoue and Keiichiro Inoue.)

February 02, 2012

Evacuated village to reopen from April

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120201006980.htm>

FUKUSHIMA--The mayor of a village near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant declared Tuesday that local authorities would return in April, and urged residents who have evacuated due to the nuclear crisis to come back.

Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo said public facilities, such as schools and clinics, will also resume services in the village.

This is the first time one of the nine municipalities that fell in the government-designated evacuation zones has declared it will return. Most of Kawauchi's 3,000 residents evacuated elsewhere in Fukushima Prefecture--or outside the prefecture--after the nuclear crisis erupted in March.

"I hope residents will return in two or three years," Endo said.

Starting this month, the Kawauchi government will survey residents about their thoughts on returning, and hold meetings with them. The village government will provide dosimeters to returning residents.

Endo plans to move the village government back to its original location on March 24 and 25, and to resume administrative operations in April.

The Kawauchi government office has temporarily been relocated to Koriyama in the prefecture. Many Kawauchi residents have been staying in temporary housing units in Koriyama, and some of the village's services will still be offered in the city even after April.

Kawauchi has been divided into two zones since the nuclear crisis began--the 20-kilometer no-entry zone around the crippled nuclear plant, and the former emergency evacuation preparation zone.

Initially, the mayor planned to declare the return after decontamination work had lowered radiation levels in the village to less than one millisievert a year. However, decontamination work has been delayed partly by heavy snowfall, and it is likely that only public facilities and houses of families with children will be decontaminated by the end of March.

The village government said radiation levels in many residential areas have fallen below one microsievert per hour.

In Tuesday's declaration, Endo accepted that some residents had concerns about returning to the village.

"Those who can return will return," he said. "Those who are still anxious can return after watching the situation for a while."

Although the designation of the emergency evacuation preparation zone was lifted in September, only slightly more than 200 residents have returned to the village.

Declaration 'just the beginning' / Mayor's plea for villagers to return to Kawauchi draws mixed reactions

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120201006236.htm>

FUKUSHIMA--"The declaration to return home is just the beginning," said Yuko Endo, mayor of Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, in a speech at a press conference encouraging residents who had evacuated amid the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant crisis to return to the village.

The Kawauchi government will reopen the village office and schools in April to prepare for the residents' return. But a complete return of evacuees is problematic, as decontamination work is ongoing.

Parts of Kawauchi fall within the nuclear plant's 20-kilometer no-entry zone, and some residents are concerned about the village's decision. "We can't return home yet," one said.

Tsunehiro Takano, the village's fifth administrative district leader, attended the same press conference as Endo Tuesday at the Fukushima prefectural government's office. Takano, 62, is also chairman of all the administrative district leaders in the village.

"Only people who want to return to Kawauchi should do so and go first. It's important to prepare an environment acceptable to other residents. If nobody returns to the village, no one will end up [following the first returnees]," Takano emphasized.

"It is also our generation that should commit ourselves to decontamination work," he added.

But Norimoto Igari, Kawauchi's third administrative district leader, had a different view.

"Most of the residents, including me, don't want to return," the 68-year-old said.

His administrative district consists of many elderly people living alone.

"If stores don't reopen, elderly people without vehicles will face difficulties buying food," Igari warned.

Hiroichi Watanabe is the village's second administrative district leader and a rice farmer. The village government will order the village's farmers to refrain from planting rice this year.

"We farmers wonder what the point of hurriedly returning to Kawauchi is if we can't sell our rice," Watanabe said.

The answer is more straightforward for Nobuichi Kobayashi, leader of the eighth administrative district, which falls completely within the no-entry zone.

"We can't return," Kobayashi, 66, said.

The municipal government will build temporary housing units in Kawauchi for residents such as Kobayashi. However, according to Kobayashi, "Unless decontamination begins soon, the number of residents who refuse to return will increase."

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Few kids want to return

Kawauchi has one nursery school, one primary school and one middle school. According to a survey by the village government, only 30 of 210 children want to return to school in Kawauchi from April.

Yoshinobu Ishii, the village schools' superintendent, said, "Even though the student numbers are few, we won't drop the level of our education."

The board of education intends to maintain a class for each grade instead of introducing composite classes comprising students from different grades.

It will also in April transfer the village-run cram school Kogakujuku from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to the village. Catering to students from the fifth grade of primary school to the third year of middle school, Kogakujuku was operating before the March 11 disaster.

According to the board of education, radiation levels in the Kawauchi Middle School yard dropped to 0.2 microsievert per hour in December, and 0.14 microsievert per hour at Kawauchi Primary School after decontamination had been carried out.

A 34-year-old woman living with her husband, 8-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son in a temporary housing unit in Koriyama after evacuating from her home in the no-entry zone, said: "Even though we can return, we'll have to live in temporary housing. It's difficult for us to return until all the decontamination has been completed."

February 01, 2012

Kawauchi village in Fukushima calls on evacuees to return home

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120201p2g00m0dm113000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The mayor of Kawauchi, a village in Fukushima Prefecture whose residents were forced to relocate following the nearby nuclear power plant crisis, called on some 2,600 evacuated villagers Tuesday to return home permanently.

"Let's return starting with those who are ready," Yuko Endo said at a press conference in Fukushima city, marking the first declaration among the nine town and village governments in the prefecture which evacuated their offices that it will return to its original location.

"There are matters of concern but there is no reason why we shouldn't take the first step forward," Endo added.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said at a separate press conference that the declaration is an "important first step toward residents' returning to their home village," and added that the central government will "actively support" the Kawauchi village government's effort.

Kawauchi had about 2,990 residents before Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was crippled by the earthquake and tsunami disaster of March 11, 2011.

About 75 percent of the villagers currently reside in the prefectural city of Koriyama where the Kawauchi government has relocated its functions because the village was partially designated as a no-entry zone set up by the central government around the nuclear power plant while the rest was categorized as an emergency evacuation preparation area.

In addition, a total of 542 Kawauchi residents were residing in 26 prefectures other than Fukushima as of Friday, while some 200 have returned to their homes since the central government lifted its evacuation advisory for the emergency preparation area of the village last September.

In November, the village government began decontamination work for schools and other public facilities in the hope of declaring in December that it would return to the village.

But the declaration was delayed for about a month as decontamination work is taking longer than expected. The work is expected to be completed by the end of March, paving the way for resumption of the village government, schools and other operations at the start of fiscal 2012 on April 1.

Most sections of the village are safe as radiation levels are less than 1 microsievert per hour, according to the Kawauchi government.

But the chances of all residents returning to the village are low in view of lingering radiation concerns.

Radioactive noodles Feb 13, 2012

February 13, 2012

High level of radioactive cesium found in Okinawa noodles

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120213p2a00m0na010000c.html>

NAHA -- High levels of radioactive cesium have been detected in noodles produced in Okinawa, apparently because they were made with water filtered by ashes from Fukushima-produced wood.

The noodles, called "Okinawa soba," had a level of radioactivity of 258 becquerels of cesium per kilogram. The restaurant that produced them had kneaded them with water filtered by the ashes of Fukushima Prefecture-produced wood.

The Forestry Agency on Feb. 10 notified prefectures across Japan not to use ashes made from wood or charcoal in cooking if the materials were lumbered or produced in Fukushima Prefecture, Tokyo and 15 other prefectures following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March last year, even if the wood or charcoal bore levels of cesium lower than the government-set standard -- 40 becquerels per kilogram for cooking wood and 280 becquerels per kilogram for charcoal.

According to the agency, the cesium contamination of Okinawan noodles surfaced on Feb. 7 in testing conducted by the Okinawa Prefectural Government. An ensuing survey found 468 becquerels of cesium in cooking wood that was distributed through the same route as the one for wood delivered to the restaurant.

The central government set a standard on Nov. 2 last year stating that the radioactivity of cesium concentrated by burning wood or charcoal should not exceed 8,000 becquerels per kilogram -- a level allowed for landfill at disposal sites. However, methods for examining the concentration were not established until Nov. 18, while the cooking wood in question was shipped on Nov. 7.

"We had not assumed that ashes would be used in food processing (when we drew up the standard)," said a Forestry Agency official.

Ashes are used in kneading noodles and sometimes in removing the bitter taste, or "aku" from devil's tongue and wild vegetables.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Antinukes

February 14, 2012

Civic group files petition with Osaka city over nuclear power

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120214p2g00m0dm157000c.html>

OSAKA (Kyodo) -- A civic group seeking a referendum on whether to keep nuclear power plants said Tuesday it has filed a direct petition with the city of Osaka to hold a plebiscite on the issue in the wake of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The group said it has submitted about 55,000 valid signatures, well over the legally required minimum figure of 42,673, one-fiftieth of the eligible voters in the city, to ask the government to hold a referendum on power plants run by Kansai Electric Power Co.

Hajime Imai, the secretary general of the group, Let's Decide/Citizen-initiated National Referendum on Nuclear Power, said, "As a citizen of the city of Osaka, which is the largest shareholder in Kansai Electric, we have a responsibility and right to engage in the future of nuclear plants."

Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto will summon the city assembly within 20 days and submit a draft ordinance with feedback on whether to support the proposal.

A majority vote by the assembly is required to hold a referendum but Hashimoto's regional political party, the Osaka Restoration Association, is taking a cautious stance as the mayor is reluctant to hold one, citing the huge costs involved.

Under the proposed ordinance, all Osaka city residents aged 16 or over, including permanent foreign residents, would be asked to vote on whether to allow the nuclear plants to keep operating.

The ordinance will also oblige the mayor and city assembly to ask the power company and the central government to act in accordance with the result of the referendum.

The group began gathering signatures on Dec. 10 in Tokyo and Osaka. In Tokyo, the group has collected some 250,000 signatures, far more than the legal requirement to call on the Tokyo metropolitan government to hold a referendum, it said.

compensation - update Feb 18, 2012

N-compensation criteria set / Center urges TEPCO to pay without confirmation of assets' condition

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120217005650.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The government's dispute resolution center for damage caused by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has urged Tokyo Electric Power Co. to swiftly accept compensation claims involving properties in evacuation zones, even if the present status of a property is unconfirmed.

The Center for Dispute Resolution for Compensating Damages from the Nuclear Power Plant Incident announced Thursday general criteria in four categories in which it urges TEPCO to respond to compensation claims.

The criteria say TEPCO should swiftly pay compensation to evacuees who left behind real estate and other assets in evacuation zones but cannot immediately confirm the details of the damage to those assets. TEPCO has not paid compensation for damage to residences, household items and machinery in the no-entry zone and other areas due to such factors as uncertainty over when residents will be able to return and the impossibility of confirming the damage to such property.

Since the government will review evacuation areas, the timing of residents' return has been unclear and the current state of their assets cannot be confirmed. Therefore, TEPCO asserts, it cannot determine accurate sums for compensation.

However, the center's criteria say that even in cases where the current state of assets cannot be confirmed, TEPCO should pay compensation after assessing the degree of loss incurred from the owners' inability to use the assets.

The criteria also say TEPCO should compensate people who voluntarily left their areas due to the nuclear disaster for the cost of their evacuation.

In these cases, the criteria say TEPCO should accept demands for compensation even if the costs exceed those proposed in guidelines established by the Committee for Dispute Resolution for Compensating Damages from the Nuclear Power Plant Incident. The center was created under the panel.

Only five disputes have been resolved by the center's mediation so far.

The center made the criteria known to the public because it intends to push TEPCO to swiftly resolve disputes by clarifying the center's basic stance on the issue, according to observers.

The center started work in September to smoothly resolve disputes about compensation for damages caused by the nuclear disaster.

If victims ask the center to mediate their disputes with TEPCO, lawyers coordinate negotiations between the victims and TEPCO to encourage them to reach settlements.

As of Wednesday, the center had accepted 948 requests for mediation.

Concerning compensation for those who voluntarily left places where evacuation was not required, the committee has presented a guideline that 400,000 yen should be paid per person for children and pregnant women, and 80,000 yen for other adults for the period through December.

But the center's general criteria say if total travel outlays, hotel costs, other expenses and consolation money exceed the committee's suggested amounts, TEPCO should pay the higher sum.

The committee had limited compensation for people who voluntarily evacuated to those with former addresses in 23 municipalities, including the cities of Fukushima and Koriyama.

However, the center's general criteria say compensation should be paid to people from other areas with high radiation levels similar to those in the 23 municipalities.

Currently, the amount of consolation money for evacuees from government-designated evacuation areas is between 100,000 yen and 120,000 yen a month.

However, the center's general criteria stipulate the amounts can be raised if the evacuees' psychological suffering is especially high, such as for those who need nursing care.

The committee previously presented an interim guideline about compensation. The center's latest criteria present more detailed standards, designed to encourage direct negotiations between TEPCO and victims.

On Thursday the center also released a report about its activities in which it criticized TEPCO's attitude toward reconciliation. The company has reserved judgment over whether to pay compensation to victims in many cases, it said.

"TEPCO has not shown an attitude of trying to positively proceed with dispute-resolution procedures," it said.

Hiroshi Noyama, chief of the center's dispute resolution office, criticized the firm, saying, "TEPCO is far more reluctant regarding the procedures than we expected."

A TEPCO official said, "We sincerely accept the center's opinion and will make utmost efforts."

February 18, 2012

[Fukushima nuke disaster refugees may get lump-sum compensation payments](http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120218p2a00m0na010000c.html)

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120218p2a00m0na010000c.html>

A government committee has proposed lump-sum compensation payments to nuclear crisis refugees from within the exclusion zones around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, it has been learned.

The Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation proposed the move after concluding that the current multi-installment payment system may prevent residents from restarting their lives in other parts of Japan as they wait to return home.

Furthermore, experts fear that even five years from now radiation doses within the no-go zones may not have decreased to the government-mandated maximum of 20 millisieverts per year, casting uncertainty on the futures of those hoping to return. At present, radiation doses in the zones stand at 50 millisieverts per year or more.

If the proposal is passed, lump-up payments will be made to residents whose homes fall within the 20-kilometer no-entry zone around the damaged nuclear plant, and will aim to cover evacuees' expected future living expenses even after entry restrictions are lifted. The exact payment amount has not yet been decided, but the committee is currently discussing sums covering a minimum of five years.

According to sources, the plan has almost been finalized.

Under the current reparation system, Fukushima No. 1 plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) pays nuclear disaster evacuees installments every three months. Amounts are calculated by adding the monthly base compensation of 100,000 yen per person to a recipient's cost of living, which changes depending on income status.

Meanwhile, under the committee proposal residents whose homes fall in so-called "restricted residence regions," where current radiation doses stand at 20 to 50 millisieverts per year, will likely be eligible to choose between lump-sum or monthly payments.

The committee has also attempted to address the problem of TEPCO cutting reparation amounts in cases where residents have other income, such as part-time jobs. The cuts were introduced by the committee in August last year, but have been fiercely criticized by many evacuees who say the cuts only serve to dampen the motivation to find jobs.

To tackle the issue, the committee discussed the possibility of not enforcing deductions for those earning less than a certain income -- 150,000 yen per month for example, the equivalent of Japan's minimum wage. Deliberations ended, however, without reaching any concrete decision on the issue.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Testing children ? What for ?

February 21, 2012

Gov't emergency headquarters refused to conduct additional thyroid testing on children

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120221p2a00m0na018000c.html>

The government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters did not fulfill requests from the Cabinet's Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan (NSC) to conduct further testing on the internal radioactive exposure of children whose levels were within the maximum allowable amount, but nonetheless high, it has emerged.

Between March 26 and March 30 last year, the emergency headquarters used simple radiation sensors to test thyroid radiation exposure among 1,080 children between the ages of 0 and 15. The children were living in areas outside the 30-kilometer radius from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant where high levels of radiation exposure were likely.

None of the children registered radiation exposure levels exceeding 0.2 microsieverts per hour, the figure set by the NSC as one above which children would be required to undergo a more thorough examination. However, one child from the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki registered 0.1 microsieverts per hour, whose accumulated thyroid exposure to radiation was calculated to be around or above 30 millisieverts.

On March 30, after the NSC was informed of the results from the government's nuclear emergency headquarters, NSC asked that additional tests be conducted on the child with a thyroid monitor, which is capable of taking more precise measurements.

"Because iodine has a short half life, it's hard to get a grasp of what's going on unless measurements are taken early on," an NSC official explains.

On April 1, 2011, however, the government's emergency headquarters decided not to conduct further tests, citing "the difficulty of transporting a 1-ton thyroid monitor," "requiring the child to travel long distances for tests," and "risk of spreading extreme panic and making the child, the child's family and their local community targets of unwarranted discrimination" as reasons.

Yasumasa Fukushima, head of the nuclear emergency headquarters' medical support division, says: "I don't know what specifically transpired at the time, but ultimately the parties involved agreed not to conduct further testing. Thinking back on it now, we should have."

"Perhaps we should have used stronger language in appealing for further tests," says an NSC official. "We weren't satisfied with the emergency headquarters' response, but we feared that we would be stepping on toes and didn't push the matter any further."

Last June, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) changed its guidelines for ingesting potassium iodide to prevent thyroid exposure to radioactive iodine. Based on information that accumulated thyroid exposure to radiation of 50 millisieverts can elevate the risk of thyroid cancer in children, the standard was lowered from 100 millisieverts to 50 millisieverts. The 30 millisieverts detected in the child from Iwaki was not far from that limit, and depending on how the crisis unfolded, the situation could have gotten worse.

Meanwhile, Yoshihisa Matsumoto, an associate professor of radiobiology at Tokyo Institute of Technology says: "Based on data we have obtained, I don't think we'll see an increase in thyroid cancer in Fukushima. But if more precise data had been collected at the time, it could have been used to put residents' minds more at ease."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Fukushima cats and dogs

February 27, 2012

300 pets still in Fukushima facilities

Yuki Koike / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--More than 300 dogs and cats rescued from around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were still being kept at animal shelters and other facilities in Fukushima Prefecture as of Friday, according to a prefectural government-led group taking care of such animals.

After the crisis began, the prefecture rescued 902 animals from around the power plant, including from within the 20-kilometer no-entry zone, that were apparently left at home by owners forced to evacuate after the March 11 disaster.

About 600 dogs and cats have since been collected by their previous owners or placed with new ones, but 305 remain at the facilities. Many are still there because their owners are living in temporary housing units and other evacuation facilities.

The group is struggling with the high cost of caring for the animals and health problems resulting from their long-term stay in the shelters.

One 350-square-meter shelter was created in Fukushima by repairing a former factory and a warehouse. About 110 dogs are kept there.

"Some of the dogs are sick because they've been here so long. Some have stomach pains from stress," said Tadashi Toyoda, a veterinarian in charge of checking the pets' health.

Toyoda was concerned about the dogs being in cages, saying, "It's also best for dogs to be in homes."

After the nuclear crisis began last March, the prefectural government set up animal rescue headquarters in cooperation with the prefectural veterinarians association, a volunteer group for animal protection and the city governments of Koriyama and Iwaki.

The animal shelters were established in Fukushima and Miharu in the prefecture.

The group worked to find homes for them, posting photos of the animals on its website. As a result, about 600 animals have been taken in by new or previous owners.

The owners of 70 percent of the 305 dogs and cats remaining have been found, but they cannot take their pets home for various reasons.

Masayuki Ishimoda, a 37-year-old landscape gardener, left his pet dog Konta at home in Okuma, where the power plant is located.

When Ishimoda made a temporary home visit in July, he found Konta alive and left the dog at one of the group's facilities. Currently, Ishimoda lives in an apartment in Iwaki.

"When I see Konta at the shelter, he approaches me and wags his tail. I can't give him up after seeing that," Ishimoda said.

According to the prefectural government, many owners living in apartments or temporary housing units say they want to reclaim their pets after they return home.

Some temporary housing units allow residents to have pets, or set up special facilities for pets. But many owners seem hesitant, worried the animals might bother other residents.

One dog has been in a shelter since late April.

The prefectural government has spent about 100 million yen so far to maintain two animal shelters for about 230 pets and to pay for medicines at animal hospitals that are caring for pets at the prefecture's request.

These costs were covered by donations, but the prefecture will likely have to spend about 5 million yen a month to continue the animal protection project.

A prefectural official in charge of food and environmental health said, "There's a limit as to how long an administrative body can take care of pets. We'll eventually close these facilities but we don't know when."

"What we can do is continue talking with pets' owners [about their pets' future]," the official added.

TEPCO and compensation update Feb 26, 2012

February 25, 2016

TEPCO must be proactive in nuke crisis compensation negotiations

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120225p2a00m0na001000c.html>

The government's center for settling disputes over compensation for nuclear accidents has revealed new restitution standards for the ongoing Fukushima nuclear crisis.

In principle, the standards call on Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to pay 100,000 yen per month to every person that has left their home in accordance with official evacuation advisories. The amount should not be halved after the seventh month following the accident, as was initially planned.

Moreover, for those who evacuated at their own discretion, TEPCO is required to cover transportation and accommodation expenses in excess of the amounts listed by the interim guidelines set by the government's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage (400,000 yen for children and expecting mothers and 80,000 yen for others). TEPCO is also required to pay compensation for any damage caused by the nuclear disaster to properties in evacuation zones, even without on-site checks to confirm the properties' conditions.

The center is under the umbrella of the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage supervised by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry.

The new standards announced by the center are more specific than those outlined in the interim guidelines unveiled by the committee in August last year, and calls for broader relief measures for disaster victims. This is partly because the impact of the nuclear disaster is more serious than initially imagined.

The central government has notified the Fukushima Prefectural Government that there are some areas where residents will not be able to return for many years. Many other areas designated as evacuation zones must be decontaminated to reduce radiation levels before residents can come home. However, there is no prospect that decontamination will be completed in the foreseeable future.

It is easy to imagine that the prolonged evacuation has been a mental, physical and economic burden on the refugees. It is a matter of course that the amount of compensation must be calculated based on the degree of this suffering and that payments must be made promptly.

What is worrisome is the slow progress in the center's efforts to settle disputes between evacuees and TEPCO over compensation. The over 150 lawyers and other experts who serve as mediators and inspectors with the center have settled less than 10 out of the some 900 claims filed.

The center cited TEPCO's negative attitude toward compensation negotiations as a main reason for the slow progress. The utility has refused to respond to victims' claims that their residences and other properties have been rendered worthless by the crisis, on the grounds that decontamination methods and the timing of their return home have not yet been determined.

It goes without saying that to be fair, TEPCO needs to be cautious in settling disputes over nuclear crisis compensation. However, if such disputes are prolonged, it will cause the victims yet more suffering and worsen sentiment towards the utility. If settlement negotiations fail and victims launch lawsuits against TEPCO, it will give both victims and the utility extra burdens, legal costs not the least among them.

TEPCO has recently notified the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage that it intends to pay full compensation for all residences and their lots in areas where residents cannot return for the foreseeable future. The power supplier should proactively take steps to pay compensation based on the actual degree of damage.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Yoshioka's bulletin

February 28, 2012

Bulletin details Fukushima life

Motoshi Sakata / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120227004478.htm>

In the hopes of narrowing the information gap between people living in and outside of Fukushima Prefecture, a Buddhist priest has begun publishing bulletins describing the hardships caused by the March 11 nuclear disaster suffered by residents living in the disaster-hit area.

Token Yoshioka, 64, heads the Entsuji temple in Fukushima. Since autumn, Yoshioka has been compiling and self-publishing a bulletin titled, "How things would have been if the nuclear accident had never happened."

The bulletin features firsthand accounts from victims of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident living in various parts of the country, as well as farmers in the prefecture suffering from negative perceptions of their agricultural produce both domestically and overseas.

After traveling to Tokyo to attend a relative's wedding in August last year, Yoshioka was aghast to hear an acquaintance tell him, "You shouldn't make fantastical remarks such as 'returning to our hometown'; there's no possibility for residents near the nuclear facility of returning home considering how polluted the area is."

The man went on to say: "Regarding compensation, you should be aware you'll need money from taxpayers. You have to give up on that kind of idea and should instead think about what you should do for the future."

In light of the celebratory event, Yoshioka managed to keep his cool. However, later that night, he could not sleep due his anger regarding the remarks.

During the wedding, he also overheard another guest say, "Because Fukushima residents were dependent on electricity supplied by the nuclear plant, they just simply have to put up with the accident."

In actuality, however, electricity generated from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant had been sent exclusively to the Tokyo metropolitan area.

Yoshioka said he was about to erupt in anger over people's indifference caused by ignorance about the actual situation.

Born and raised in the city of Fukushima, Yoshioka said, "We used to be proud of how clean the air we breathed and water we drank was, and how delicious the vegetables and fruits in our hometown were--all of which were irreplaceably precious."

The catastrophe, however, contaminated everything that he and his neighbors were proud of. Yoshioka said 39 of the 210 children in the kindergarten he operated were forced to leave their hometown. The remaining kindergartners are allowed outdoors for no more than two hours per week, he lamented.

"A sense that the deep suffering of nuclear accident victims might not be understood by people living outside the prefecture made up my mind about publishing the bulletin," Yoshioka said.

In one of the articles for the bulletin's inaugural issue, he wrote, "These days, our greetings in the morning and evenings start with exchanging information about radioactivity readings, and topics TV programs and newspapers cover are also mostly about the disaster. An increasing number of families with children have found it unavoidable to send their children to live outside the prefecture for their safety, making it so that parents must live separately from their children."

In another article, he wrote: "Many resorts and inns in the prefecture have been battered by sharp declines in the number of guests, while visitors to some fruit orchards have shrunk to one-tenth of numbers before the disaster, in spite of the fact that there is no [scientific] reason for the orchards to be subject to such aversion."

Comprising four A-4 size pages, the bulletin's inaugural issue was published on Nov. 15 with the primary aim of shedding light on the woes of citizens facing the menace of radioactive contamination and the sadness of local farmers affected by suspicions of radioactive pollution in their produce.

Yoshioka printed 4,000 copies of the first edition at his own expense, sending them to evacuees outside the prefecture and other acquaintances.

There was a lot of feedback, with one person replying "I'm now aware, for the first time, about the depth of sorrow people in Fukushima face and would like my neighbors to read your bulletin."

He also subsequently received a message from France suggesting the bulletin be translated into French. According to the message, details about the Fukushima disaster were not reported in the French media as France is keen to promote nuclear power generation. Yoshioka said the person who sent the message wanted to distribute the bulletin to friends.

The bimonthly bulletin's circulation increased to 12,000 copies when its second issue was published on Jan. 1.

The issue featured a kanji meaning "lie" to symbolize 2011. Explaining his reasoning behind that choice, Yoshioka wrote, "Because of the 'lie' that the nuclear power plant would be completely safe, Fukushima residents have become suspicious about all things."

The second issue also detailed the circumstances surrounding about 160,000 evacuees. In the afterword, he wrote that evacuees were "forced to start the New Year in a desolate manner as they were driven out of their hometowns. This would have never happened if the nuclear accident had not occurred."

With the first anniversary of the nuclear accident approaching, Yoshioka was busy preparing for the bulletin's third issue, which is scheduled for publication on Thursday.

One of the articles to be included in the issue tackles the delay in compensation payments from nuclear power plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Minamisoma's children return to school - Feb 27, 2012

February 27, 2012

Schools reopen in Fukushima's Minamisoma

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120227_22.html

More schools in Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture that have been closed since the nuclear accident last March, have reopened.

The four elementary and junior high schools have been holding classes in temporary facilities elsewhere.

But the students were able to return to their own buildings on Monday.

The reopening follows the completion of cleanup work after an evacuation advisory for the city was lifted at the end of September.

At Ishigami Daini elementary school, located 25 kilometers from the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, many children arrived in the morning by car.

At an assembly, a 6-grader speaking on behalf of the pupils, said he will be happy to graduate from the original school building. He said he wants to make his remaining years in school fulfilling, partly for friends who have not returned.

The school says only 197 of its 493 pupils are coming back.

With the reopening of the 4 schools, all elementary and junior high schools in what was previously an evacuation zone, have resumed classes.

TEPCO compensation - update March 1, 2012

March 1, 2012

TEPCO ups payout for some evacuees

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120229004312.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Tokyo Electric Power Co. decided to increase compensation payments to children and pregnant women who voluntarily evacuated from 23 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture due to the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant from 400,000 yen to 600,000 yen, the utility announced Tuesday.

In December, the government's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation set the amount at 400,000 yen for children and pregnant woman in the municipalities--including the cities of Fukushima and Koriyama--where the government did not issue evacuation instructions out of the 59 municipalities in the prefecture. TEPCO decided to increase the compensation by 200,000 yen.

TEPCO defines children as those who were 18 years old or younger on March 11, 2011. Women who were pregnant between March 11 and Dec. 31, 2011, are eligible for the payments. The company made the decision as it has determined voluntary evacuation costs would top 400,000 yen, TEPCO officials said.

The utility will start sending documents to about 1.5 million residents in the 23 cities, towns and villages on Monday. TEPCO plans to transfer the money to applicants' bank accounts starting in late March with the total expected to top 200 billion yen.

The panel asked TEPCO to make the payments regardless of whether or not evacuations actually took place.

TEPCO plans to pay 400,000 yen for children and pregnant women who did not evacuate from the municipalities.

It will pay 80,000 yen to other adults according to the guidelines set by the panel.

A couple with one child--and the mother not pregnant--will be eligible to receive 760,000 yen in compensation if they evacuated voluntarily. If they did not evacuate, they will be eligible for 560,000 yen. Couples who were not expecting will be eligible for 160,000 yen.

Two lessons from the disaster

March 3, 2012

Editorial: Lessons learned 1 year after March 2011 disasters

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120303p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Ryoichi Abe, 51, a fisherman from Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, was operating off the Ojika Peninsula when a massive tsunami generated by the Great East Japan Earthquake hit his neighborhood on March 11, 2011.

Two days after the tsunami, he returned to his home port and was shocked by the devastation wrought by the disaster. Sixteen of the 120 residents in his neighborhood died. Many of his fellow fishermen lost their fishing boats and equipment.

It was volunteers from urban areas who encouraged Abe and other fishermen who had lost enthusiasm about fishing to resume their business. The volunteers carefully unraveled ropes and nets that had become tangled in fishing devices, and recovered usable equipment. Abe and other fishermen joined the volunteers in their work. In the summer, the fishermen were able to resume oyster farming.

"We got to this point thanks to the volunteers. They have incredible power. I'll never forget what they did for us," Abe says.

He says he and his fellow fishermen will be able to ship the oysters in autumn this year if things go smoothly.

Close bonds between disaster survivors who are trying hard to move toward recovery and those who are lending a helping hand can be observed throughout disaster-ravaged areas.

We would like to take this opportunity as we approach the first anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami to think about what we have lost -- and learned -- from the disasters.

The losses are enormous: the lives of some 20,000 people, the assets and the peace of hundreds of thousands of people and numerous jobs. Residents of areas heavily affected by the ongoing crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant have also been deprived of the freedom to live in their hometowns.

Yet amid such hardships, Japanese people have shown to the world that they have a strong will to restore their livelihoods. Close bonds and solidarity between victims and those who have shown willingness to share their pain have shone through the disaster.

We would like to cite two things we have learned from the March 2011 quake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis.

One of them is **the importance of politics**. The government's response to the disasters has demonstrated that politics has not functioned properly and has been in chaos since March 11, 2011.

Even though the government set up several task forces to handle disaster countermeasures, its system of political leadership -- having politicians being responsible for decisions on policy while bureaucrats put their expertise to work to implement these measures -- has failed to function as far as the government's response to the disasters is concerned.

The ruling and opposition parties have also failed to cooperate closely to solve problems with speed and focus. On the contrary, a conflict within the ruling bloc has contributed to confusion in the political situation, and delayed solutions to problems that require political-level decisions.

The 4 trillion yen initial supplementary budget for fiscal 2011 -- designed to finance disaster recovery efforts -- did not become law until May 2, 2011. Furthermore, the government's compilation of the principles for disaster recovery, which provide direction during the recovery period and cover the scale and length of recovery measures, the financial resources required and the designation of special restoration zones, did not come until July 29 -- 4 1/2 months after the disasters.

The government finally set up the Reconstruction Agency on Feb. 10 -- 11 months after the Great East Japan Earthquake. This is in stark contrast to the establishment of a similar body only four weeks after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake that devastated Tokyo and its environs.

Enhancing political ability to solve problems is important as a means to protect ourselves from future disasters and indispensable when the government tackles other outstanding issues.

Our second lesson is **the inevitability of a fundamental review of Japan's energy policy** -- including nuclear power. We were overconfident of the safety of nuclear power plants. The ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has raised such questions as how to decrease Japan's reliance on nuclear power plants, how to secure substitute energy sources and how to solve problems involving radioactive waste. Even though these are extremely difficult questions, Japan can make an important contribution to global society by solving them and setting an example through reduced reliance on nuclear energy.

We would like to make good use of the lessons learned from the disasters in the future. To that end, we would like to make specific proposals in this series, "One year after March 11, 2011."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Even sake...

March 5, 2012

Saving sake: Struggling to restore confidence in Fukushima's liquor-destined rice

"It really brought tears to my eyes," said Fukushima Prefecture sake producer Yasuhiro Watanabe, recalling the moment he saw a brand new bottle of sake and vegetables from the prefecture discarded in a station rubbish bin in Tokyo.

Watanabe, the 46-year-old president of Fukushima sake manufacturing company Watanabe Shuzo Honten was on his way back from a June 2011 campaign with friends to promote Fukushima Prefecture produce in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis when he saw the discarded products. He guessed someone had bought them under obligation and then thrown them away.

After the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Watanabe took part in several "revival campaigns," promoting Fukushima Prefecture produce in a bid to curb rumors about radiation from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. However, his efforts were not always well received. On one occasion an angry person confronted him and shouted "Don't sell things like that here" -- even though he had strived to let people know that all the sake, or rice wine, had been tested and no radioactive materials had been detected.

He recalls thinking: "Next year I'm going to produce rice that contains absolutely no radioactive materials."

As a student, Watanabe studied in Niigata University's Faculty of Agriculture, majoring in agronomy, the study of soil in relation to crop production. He handled radioactive materials in experiments during this period, and is the only such "specialist" among the sake storehouses in the prefecture. He feels that producing sake in Fukushima is his destiny and believes it is his mission to pass on his knowledge to others. He is now using his expertise on chemicals to support farmers.

The potassium used as a fertilizer is chemically similar to radioactive cesium in the soil, and it is held to be effective in limiting the amount of cesium that is absorbed into crops. This fiscal year, farmers were eligible for government subsidies when purchasing potassium. However, only half the cost was covered, meaning the burden for farmers remained high. When the rice-producing season began in June, farmers were left to decide for themselves whether or not to use potassium -- though information on its effectiveness had not been passed on to all farmers.

After receiving the results of tests of rice produced last year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Fukushima Prefectural Government announced in December that the amount of potassium in the soil was connected with the level of radioactive substances detected. Officials accordingly decided to boost instruction to farmers the next fiscal year, but such instruction was late coming.

Watanabe is now working in tandem with agricultural cooperative officials, and holding lectures for farmers in various areas. At his lectures, the first thing he does is write the periodic table of the elements on the whiteboard. This is to help him explain why potassium is effective in curbing absorption of

radioactive materials. It looks difficult at first glance, but the farmers go home saying, "I understood it well." At the end of his lectures, he always tells the farmers: "We can't simply be victims. Let's study together more."

Why does Watanabe go to such lengths? Because over 10 percent of the rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture is used in sake production.

"Sake has to protect Fukushima's rice," he says. Next year he wants his sake to boldly declare: "Produced with Fukushima Prefecture rice." To that end, his own study is continuing. (By Yuriko Izutani, Fukushima Bureau)

(Part 1 of a five-part series)

Sake production in Fukushima faces a struggle to overcome the effects of the tsunami and radioactive contamination that has shaken its very foundations. But representatives of sake storehouses have risen in a push to protect sake whose roots lie in the prefecture. This series follows those representatives who await a true spring, in terms of both rice and sake production.

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A look at local products: Yukikomachi

Yukikomachi is a representative brand of Watanabe Shuzo Honten. It is a mellow, dry sake, with ample flavor and a crisp aftertaste. Because of its reputation as a sake that is easy to drink, women are said to make up over 30 percent of buyers. The Chinese characters on some of the labels were handwritten by Watanabe.

Is "radiation" a normal word with 3 year-olds ?

In the eyes of a child: 3-year-old's life turned upside down by Fukushima crisis

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120305p2a00m0na008000c.html>

DATE, Fukushima -- "Grandpa, radiation scares me. Let's go back."

Those were the words of 3-year-old Yuka Kanno to her grandfather Hitoshi, 61, when he took her out for a walk in this city shortly after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Almost a year after the beginning of the nuclear crisis, triggered by a massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, radiation doses in Date are still high. As a result, Yuka's world has changed drastically -- from playing outdoors to staying at home alone, watching anime and playing with her dolls.

"She always plays quietly on her own," Yuka's 53-year-old grandmother Tomoko says, as she reflects on how the nuclear disaster has affected her granddaughter's life.

"I couldn't leave her alone at the time," Tomoko recalls, still regretting how at the beginning of the nuclear crisis, fearing that there would be no food left in the city, she took Yuka with her when she went out to buy supplies. It was only much later that she learned that radioactive iodine from the Fukushima plant had fallen on the region.

One after another, most families with children around Yuka's age have left Date. This April, the 3-year-old will enter a kindergarten near her family's house. Originally, 13 children were scheduled to enroll with her. Now, there are only two others.

However, Yuka's mother Miyuki -- a 27-year-old pharmacist -- fears she won't be able to find a job if she leaves the city. After months of anxiety, she decided to stay with Yuka and her parents in Date. It was not an easy choice, made with much fear and hesitation.

"Miyuki's expressions on her face had changed for a while since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster," her mother Tomoko recalls.

Yuka now spends most of every day watching animated kids' shows on satellite TV, which her grandfather -- who retired from teaching last year and is now a farmer -- subscribes to so that Yuka wouldn't get bored and lonely while stuck indoors. She gets to play outside her house sometimes, too, though for no more than 20 minutes at a time, once every few days.

"She was quick to remember the word 'radioactivity,'" Hitoshi says.

When Tomoko has to take her granddaughter out, she carries her on her back to prevent the curious Yuka from touching dirt and plants along the way. She often tries to grab things anyway, and Tomoko stops her every time.

What Yuka is allowed to eat has also changed drastically. Before the disaster, Miyuki used to feed her rice from Hitoshi's fields, but has now switched to rice from the prefectural city of Kitakata, far from the nuclear plant. Even though tests last year showed Hitoshi's rice was not tainted with radioactive cesium, Miyuki still worried that it wouldn't be safe enough for her daughter.

Regional produce is also forbidden at the family table, though Yuka loves fried "tara" sprouts -- a local vegetable.

"I really want to eat it," Yuka often tells her grandmother who, unable to fulfill Yuka's wishes, is heartbroken every time.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

When will people be able to get back?

Anxious Fukushima town residents await review of no-go zone

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120305p2a00m0na002000c.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima -- This town frequently witnesses many vehicles carrying workers to and from the crippled Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Okuma has a total area of about 78 square kilometers and is one of the municipalities that host the nuclear power plant. But the annual radiation dose tops 20 millisieverts for its east side, of which 70 percent still logs an annual radiation dose of more than 50 millisieverts.

As a result, roads, irrigation facilities and other infrastructure badly damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis have yet to be repaired.

In October last year, the town government mapped out a reconstruction blueprint to rebuild mainly areas where radiation doses are relatively low. But the central government is contemplating a review of the no-go zone as early as April, and it is not clear which area will be dropped from the no-go zone.

Decontamination efforts under the central government are not making progress, prompting Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe to say with a sigh, "We cannot come up with a specific reconstruction program until the central government decides on its policy."

Residents in this town have evacuated to other parts of Japan and wonder when they can return home and if there is a future for them. The town's population dropped by 585 to 10,971 as of the end of January. The town set up a study panel in January to draw up a reconstruction program by the end of March to come up with specific measures to help residents who cannot return home.

Another nagging problem is whether or not the town should approve a request by the central government to build a temporary storage facility for contaminated soil in Futaba County. "Some residents say it cannot be helped, but other residents are dead against it because accepting it will further undermine the town's image and they cannot return home," Mayor Watanabe says.

The town is also beset with many other problems, including the inability to grow rice and pears, the town's key produce. But Watanabe says, "We want to help secure jobs related to the decontamination project and rebuild the town to enable our residents to safely return home."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

What should be done about iodine ?

83% of local gov'ts have anxiety in distributing iodine preparation

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120305p2g00m0dm024000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- A Kyodo News survey showed Sunday that 83 percent of local governments nationwide have anxiety about distributing iodine preparation to their residents in case of a nuclear crisis, partly because they do not know how to instruct residents to take it.

Some said they have not yet decided how to distribute the medicine to prevent thyroid cancer in case of disaster, while others said they are uncertain if they could get appropriate instruction from the central government for the distribution and use of it.

After the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was hit by the deadly earthquake and tsunami on March 11 last year, its neighboring municipalities could not distribute iodine preparation to most of their residents, although they stockpiled it, as the central government did not instruct them how to distribute it and how to take it.

The results of the survey indicate that many local authorities are still having difficulties in preventing internal exposure.

The survey was conducted on a total of 1,789 prefectural and municipal governments in February, of which 1,517 responded.

Among those who feel anxiety about distributing iodine preparation, some said they do not clearly know when to instruct residents to take it or they lack measures to prevent adverse effects and accidental ingestion.

Listen to the people

March 6, 2012

Editorial: Gov't must listen to communities striving to recover from nuke disaster

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120306p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Restoration work has moved into high gear in municipalities where most of the residents were forced to evacuate because of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The Hirono Municipal Government, which had temporarily moved its functions to two nearby municipalities, resumed business at its own town hall on March 1. The Kawauchi Municipal Government, which became the first crisis-hit local body to declare that it would return all the residents to their homes, also returned to its village office and reopened local schools.

In February, the whole Kawauchi Village Hall, which was badly damaged by the March 11, 2011 earthquake, was hidden beneath green tarp. Now, work to restore the structure is under way. These moves have demonstrated that Fukushima Prefecture has been hit by not only the nuclear disaster.

"We were desperate to respond to the disasters while supporting village residents who were evacuated. The memory of some events has faded," says Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo, describing the past turbulent year. "I'm now preoccupied with considering what to do from here on out."

All of the some 3,000 residents of Kawauchi were evacuated after the entire village was designated as an emergency evacuation preparation zone following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. The designation was lifted in September last year, but only about 200 residents have returned home so far, while most of the others are still refugees.

Mayor Endo declared on Jan. 31 that he would return all the residents to their homes. However, he respects the choice of individual residents whether to come back or not. "Those who can return should come home, and those who are still worried can wait to see how the situation develops," he says.

A municipal government survey conducted on all the residents showed that about 60 percent either want to stay away from the village for the time being or are unsure of what to do, suggesting that a majority are feeling uneasy about the future.

The central government will review the current no-go and planned evacuation zone designations as early as April, and improve the living environment in areas where the annual radiation dose is below 20 millisieverts so that residents can return home.

Many affected municipalities will certainly face various challenges, such as decontamination, ensuring the health of residents including children, as well as the safety of their food, securing jobs and the maintenance of local communities.

In particular, difficulties must be overcome to effectively decontaminate areas tainted with radioactive substances leaking from the nuclear station. The government is currently carrying out model projects, but is still searching for truly effective decontamination methods.

A road map released by the government sets the deadline for decontaminating areas with annual radiation levels less than 50 millisieverts at March 2014. However, it stops short of setting a numerical target for lowering radiation levels.

Municipalities affected by the nuclear disaster have expressed deep dissatisfaction with the costs of decontaminating farmland and forests.

To ensure food safety and dispel concerns about health effects, the Kawauchi Municipal Government is set to install 11 radiation counters for food at schools and community halls to allow residents to test their food free of charge. The village has examined all residents aged up to 18 for internal radiation exposure, and is poised to continue monitoring their conditions. It has also begun to track the conditions of residents' thyroids.

These measures have set an example of steps affected municipalities hit by the nuclear crisis should take to ensure the health of residents.

Mayor Endo, who has been playing a leading role in working out and implementing these measures, criticizes the national government for its slow response to the disaster.

"It took too long for the government to extend assistance and provided information to affected residents," he says, and we urge the government to listen to the opinions of local communities hit by the disasters, and promptly announce specific policy measures.

At the same time, the government must build temporary storage facilities for soil contaminated with radioactive substances while consulting with the local communities that will be asked to host such facilities.

The government is planning to build such a storage facility in the Futaba district of Fukushima Prefecture, where the Fukushima No. 1 plant is located. However, a meeting scheduled by the government to exchange opinions on the matter with the mayors of the district's eight municipalities was abruptly cancelled.

Critics have said that local communities' deep distrust of the national government lay behind the cancellation. The government must take such criticism seriously.

Losing hope of returning

March 7, 2012

Evacuees from March 11 disasters losing hope of going home

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120307p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Of those who have evacuated from areas hit hard by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis, an increasing number are considering settling down in locations away from their hometowns, a Mainichi survey has found.

The latest survey, conducted nearly a full year after the onset of the triple disasters, is the second such survey by the Mainichi. In the first survey, conducted in August and September of last year, about six months after the disasters, 54 percent of respondents had said that they were thinking of settling permanently away from their hometowns. This time, 63 percent of respondents said the same, indicating an approximate 10-point increase from the earlier survey.

The results have highlighted how delayed recovery from tsunami damage and the ongoing nuclear crisis - a year after a massive earthquake triggered the disasters -- has made it impossible for evacuees to envision the prospects of their return home. Indeed, of those who are still planning on moving back to their hometowns, 53 percent responded that they had no clear idea of when that might become possible.

Of the subjects who responded to the first survey last year, 129 evacuees scattered around the country answered the latest survey in February this year. Of the respondents, 102 people -- or about 80 percent -- had evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture, 24 from Miyagi Prefecture and two from Iwate Prefecture. When asked for their reasons for not returning to their hometowns, 77 percent of respondents said "fear of radiation exposure." Twenty-seven percent responded, "the pain of living in a disaster area," 23 percent said "found work elsewhere," and 16 percent said "children adapted to new schools." As life away from "home" is prolonged, people have begun setting down roots in new places.

Some respondents also discussed the emotional scars from which they have not yet recovered, including one female respondent in her 80s who said, "My home was swept away by tsunami, and all I have are painful memories."

The survey has not shown any improvements in evacuees' stress and health conditions; while 66 percent in the earlier survey said they were feeling stress from their lives as evacuees, 60 percent said the same in the latest survey. Likewise, 61 percent said they experienced changes in health conditions in the earlier survey, while 60 percent said the same in the latest survey.

Comments such as "I can't find work and I don't know when I'll be able to return to Fukushima" from a man in his 50s who has evacuated to Fukuoka Prefecture, and "I'm finding it difficult to make interpersonal ties" from a woman in her 40s who is now in Niigata Prefecture, point to the emotional and physical strain that living in a foreign environment can have on evacuees.

In both the earlier and latest surveys, the percentage of respondents who said they were maintaining ties with people from their hometowns were about the same, at 86 percent and 87 percent, respectively. However, some subjects, including a man in his 60s who is now in Ishikawa Prefecture, said: "The frequency with which we contact each other has been diminishing compared to before."

Among evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture, where a nuclear crisis is still taking place, 40 percent said they were for the immediate abolishment of nuclear power and 56 percent said they supported abolishment over time. Meanwhile, 4 percent said that nuclear power generation should be continued. [Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Futaba wants compensation from TEPCO

March 8, 2012

Futaba Town asks TEPCO to compensate damage

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120308_19.html

Futaba Town, Fukushima Prefecture, has demanded that the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant pay about 211 million dollars as compensation for damage caused to the township.

Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa on Thursday handed an invoice to Naomi Hirose, managing director of Tokyo Electric Power Company, at a makeshift town hall inside an evacuation center in Saitama Prefecture.

The town is asking for about 211 million dollars in compensation for buildings and property. The township was forced to move after it was designated as a no-entry zone.

Fukushima Prefecture says the town became the first municipality near the troubled nuclear power plant to demand compensation from the utility.

Hirose told the mayor that the plant operator will process the matter promptly, along with compensation claims by individuals, without specifying a deadline.

Mayor Idogawa told reporters that the amount it is asking is only a portion of the unlimited damage the township has suffered since the nuclear accident. He said the town will invoice the evacuation costs later.

Difficult to remain positive in Fukushima

March 9, 2012

Life getting worse for many Fukushima residents: Mainichi poll

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120309p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Fifty-seven percent of Fukushima Prefecture residents in a survey by the Mainichi Shimbun say their life has worsened one year after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The survey shows that 35 percent of Miyagi Prefecture residents and 31 percent of Iwate Prefecture residents also shared the same view, as compared with a national average of 23 percent. Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures were hardest hit by the March 11 natural disasters and subsequent nuclear crisis.

When asked to cite their most serious concerns, 53 percent of Fukushima residents singled out health while 36 percent of Iwate residents and 34 percent of Miyagi residents respectively mentioned jobs and income.

As for specific requests to the central government, 36 percent of Fukushima residents cited medical care, reflecting their lingering concerns about radiation contamination, while 42 percent of Iwate residents and 36 percent of Miyagi residents prioritize securing employment.

According to the survey, taken March 3 and 4, 24 percent of Fukushima residents identified employment and income as the most pressing concerns, probably because many Fukushima residents are still struggling to deal with the nuclear crisis while Iwate and Miyagi prefectures have started restoration and rebuilding efforts.

When asked to assess the central government's handling of the March 11 disasters and nuclear crisis, 69 percent of Miyagi residents, 68 percent of Fukushima residents and 57 percent of Iwate residents have a low opinion of the government's efforts or gave it little credit, respectively. On the other hand, 38 percent

of Iwate residents, 30 percent of Miyagi residents and 28 percent of Fukushima residents have valued the government highly or somewhat, the survey found.

Asked about restarting idled nuclear reactors under regular inspections, an average of 57 percent of people across Japan are against such a move and 36 percent are in favor. But 74 percent of Fukushima residents are opposed to restarts and only 18 percent are in favor. Fifty-nine percent of Miyagi residents and 57 percent of Iwate residents are against restarts.

The Mainichi poll was carried out across the country, including Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, along with a separate survey of residents in the three prefectures, excluding no-go zones and other restricted areas in Fukushima.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

How much is Futaba worth to TEPCO?

March 10, 2012

Fukushima town seeks 19 billion yen from TEPCO for real estate damage

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120310p2a00m0na015000c.html>

FUTABA, Fukushima -- The mayor of this town, home to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has handed a bill to plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) for over 19.25 billion yen to cover damage to the town's real estate caused by the meltdowns at the plant.

Katsutaka Idogawa, mayor of Futaba, all of which falls within the 20-kilometer radius no-go zone around the plant, presented the bill to a TEPCO executive on March 8 when the two met at a former high school in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, where the Futaba Municipal Government's functions were transferred following the nuclear disaster.

The bill is to cover a 4.56 billion-yen charge for 2.28 square kilometers of town-owned land and 14.68 billion yen for 51 town-owned buildings, including the town hall, schools and other public facilities, which have become unusable as a result of the meltdowns at the plant, town officials said.

The municipal government demanded full compensation for the buildings, estimated based on their pre-disaster real estate value. Regarding the land, the municipal government decided to demand only 90

percent of their estimated value, as full compensation would lead to a transfer of its ownership, officials said.

According to TEPCO, this is the first time that a municipal government has demanded compensation for real estate-related damage.

"I hope our claim will serve as an example for other victims (affected by the nuclear disaster)," Idogawa said. "I will demand that TEPCO react promptly and sincerely."

"We will address this matter in good faith," the TEPCO executive said.

The Futaba Municipal Government plans to demand further compensation for the cost of the town's evacuation to Saitama Prefecture and related expenses.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

What a choice!

Municipalities around Fukushima nuclear plant divided over 'new town' scheme

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120310p2a00m0na001000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The 12 municipalities situated wholly or partly in the no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are faced with an agonizing decision: hold out as refugee communities in hopes of one day going back, or give up returning home anytime soon and establish so-called "new towns" on new land.

So far, the mayors of the 12 municipalities are divided on the issue, with four town mayors in favor of establishing new towns and six against.

The Mainichi asked the mayors if they plan to build a new municipality outside their communities in light of the likelihood that their residents will not be allowed home in the foreseeable future due to radiation from the nuclear crisis.

The town mayors of Futaba, Namie and Tomioka expressed interest in building a new town, and Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe also said, "I want to examine the possibility of securing a housing district in a safe place within the prefecture and Futaba County."

Six other local government chiefs, however, said they have no such plans.

Futaba Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa unveiled a scheme at the end of last year to build a "temporary town" complete with schools and hospitals at a new location. He says the new location should be a place where children will not be affected by nuclear radiation and town residents will move in within three years.

The town has been using an abolished school in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, since the end of March last year as a temporary town hall and evacuation center. Futaba residents now live in Tokyo, Hokkaido and 39 other prefectures. Of about 7,000 residents, around 3,400 live in Fukushima and another 1,300 in Saitama. The town has set up a branch in Koriyama in Fukushima and a liaison office in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture.

Kazuma Okubo, 60, moved into temporary housing in the city of Fukushima in July after staying in Kazo. "Leaders of municipalities in Futaba County cannot reach an agreement so long as they are outside the prefecture. I want the town to move the town hall back to Fukushima Prefecture," he says.

Fukue Asakawa, 82, who is staying at the closed school in Kazo, says, "I feel safe because I have acquaintances here. If the town hall moves, I want to follow it."

Even some young people are adjusting to life scattered across various locations, causing a rift among Futaba residents over their town's future.

Namie is considering building housing units at three locations, and two municipal office branches outside the town, for fear that residents will not be able to go home anytime soon. In a survey of residents last November, one-third said they won't go back. There is a danger of the community falling apart, but a Namie town official says, "Unless people can rebuild their lives, there will be no one to restore the town." [Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

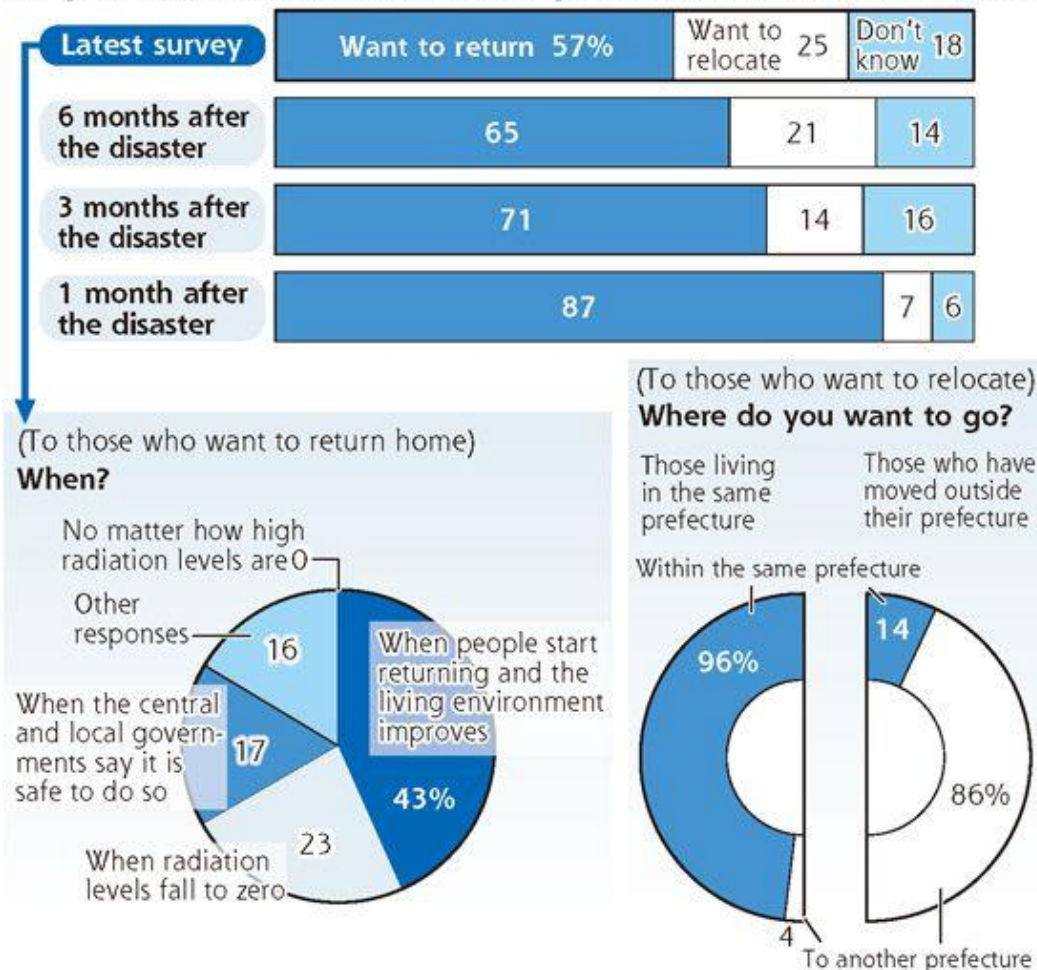
Still hoping

ONE YEAR AFTER THE DISASTER / Evacuees being left in limbo / Survey shows 57% from Fukushima Pref. still hope to return home

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120311003908.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Survey of evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture Do you want to return to where you lived before the disaster?



An increasing number of evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture have given up hope of returning to their hometowns, according to a Yomiuri Shimbun survey.

The survey, carried out prior to the one-year anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, targeted 500 evacuees from disaster-hit Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. The Yomiuri Shimbun conducted similar surveys one month, three months and six months after the disaster.

Asked whether they wanted to return to their hometowns, 57 percent in Fukushima Prefecture said they did. This contrasts with the 87 percent who felt this way in the one-month survey, 71 percent after three months and 65 percent after six months.

Evacuees in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures were more eager to return home and expressed more confidence in restoration work, according to the survey.

The survey was conducted from Feb. 21 to 29 through direct interviews with 150 evacuees each in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures and 200 people who evacuated in and outside Fukushima Prefecture due to the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, 43 percent of people responded, "We want to return to the areas where we used to live before the disaster." Although the number of people who responded this way fell from 65 percent after one month to 47 percent at three months and 42 percent at six months, the decline has stopped.

Evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture still are deeply concerned about radioactive substances and basic living standards such as jobs and houses.

They expressed serious concern about their health and children's education if they remain evacuees for a long time. One evacuee said, "We want the government to provide us with a clearer picture of the future, even it's negative, so that we can restart our lives."

Even one year after the accident, evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture seem to harbor doubts about information provided by the government.

Concerning when they would be able to return to their hometown, 43 percent responded, "When people in our neighborhood have begun to return and the living environment, including shops and hospitals, is in place." Twenty-three percent responded "when radiation levels become zero," while 17 percent said "when the central and local governments say it is safe to do so."

A 67-year-old man who evacuated from Iitate to a temporary housing unit in Date said: "I want to return to the comfortable surroundings of my hometown, but I wonder whether I can live there even if I did return. I doubt whether young people will return."

About 25 percent of Fukushima Prefecture evacuees in temporary housing wanted to move farther from the disaster-hit areas, an increase from 21 percent in the previous survey. The number of people responding like this has been increasing in each survey.

Asked why, 67 percent of evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture said they were concerned about radiation, while 55 percent said "restoration of the areas where we used to live is not possible," up from 47 percent in the previous survey. The figures indicate an increasing number of people have given up hope of returning home.

Compensation- Update March 12, 2012

TEPCO pays nearly 450 bil. yen in compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120312_03.html

The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant says the company has paid nearly 450 billion yen, or about 5.4 billion dollars, to people affected by the nuclear crisis.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, said on Sunday that compensation paid by March 9th reached 445.5 billion yen.

But only about 40 percent of individuals who are entitled to apply for compensation have completed the procedures.

People affected have criticized TEPCO, saying the application process is complicated and lacks of

flexibility in deciding payments. They say the company needs to speed up the payments.

TEPCO Vice President Zengo Aizawa said in a news conference that the company has received complaints accusing it of arrogance and a lack of compassion.

Aizawa said that the company is trying to deal with applicants more flexibly by listening to each person's situations and needs.

TEPCO started paying provisional compensation in May to people who were forced to flee their homes near the troubled plant as well as farmers and fishermen affected by the accident.

The utility started full payment to compensate them in October, based on guidelines established by the government.

How much is your suffering worth?

Panel urges 6 million yen for nuclear evacuees

The Yomiuri Shimbun March 18, 2012

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120317003465.htm>

Residents who will be unable to return to areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant for at least five years should be paid 6 million yen each as compensation for their mental suffering, a government panel has decided.

The Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation on Friday decided on new guidelines in line with the government's planned reclassification of the no-entry and expanded evacuation zones established after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the plant last year.

The facility's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., will pay compensation to affected residents based on the new guidelines, which the committee established to supplement interim guidelines announced in August.

Under the reclassification, which is expected to be implemented by the end of this month, three new categories will be established based on annual radiation doses:

-- Areas where the accumulated radiation dose exceeds 50 millisieverts per year will be designated as "zones where residency is prohibited for an extended period."

-- Areas with annual doses of above 20 and up to 50 millisieverts will be designated as "zones with restricted residency."

-- Areas where the radiation dose is 20 millisieverts or less per year will be designated as "zones being prepared for residents' return."

The committee has decided that residents whose houses are within areas that fall under the first category should be paid a lump sum of 6 million yen, equivalent to five years of the current monthly payments of 100,000 yen per person.

They also should be paid the full actual value of their real estate before the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, according to the new guidelines.

Evacuees from the "zones with restricted residency" can choose to be paid 100,000 yen every month or to receive a lump sum of 2.4 million yen--two years of compensation--as they are unlikely to be able to return to their homes for the time being.

Residents from "zones preparing to lift restrictions on residents' return"--in which people will be allowed to return to their homes once living conditions are restored through decontamination and other work--will be paid 100,000 yen every month, according to the new guidelines.

The committee also decided compensation payments will conclude at the end of August for evacuees from what used to be the emergency evacuation preparation zone--located between 20 and 30 kilometers from the crippled power plant--nearly one year after it was dissolved at the end of September.

However, residents from Naraha will be exempt from the measure because only part of the town was designated as being within the zone.

Long-term nuclear evacuees should get 6 mil. yen each: gov't panel

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120317p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

The sum is to compensate the mental suffering of evacuees whose homes are in a zone where it is difficult to return for a long time, one of the new categories to be created soon by the government in reclassifying the existing evacuation area around the plant.

The people in the so-called "difficult-to-return" area should also be paid the full value of their real estate, such as homes, as calculated just before the nuclear accident triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11 last year, according to the guidelines.

As the nuclear complex achieved a stable state of cold shutdown in December, the government is preparing to reclassify the existing no-entry zone within a 20-kilometer radius of the plant, as well as areas outside the no-go zone where annual radiation exposure is feared to reach 20 millisieverts.

Under the new classification, an area with more than 50 millisieverts a year will be designated as difficult-to-return, while an area of more than 20 and up to 50 millisieverts will be categorized as a "habitation-restricted" zone where residents will be asked to stay away until the radiation is reduced through decontamination efforts.

Residents will be allowed to return as soon as possible to areas with 20 millisieverts or less, after infrastructure is restored and the polluted land is cleaned.

The compensation panel under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology decided that a 2.4 million yen lump sum should be paid to every resident of the habitation-restricted zone for a two-year period, while 100,000 yen should be paid every month to each person from areas with 20 millisieverts or less.

The panel also acknowledged that costs stemming from decontamination activities, including the removal of polluted soil and its disposal, should also be compensated.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant, will calculate the amount of compensation payments that would increase in line with the guidelines and craft its compensation criteria for residential land, houses and household items.

The estimated amount of compensation is expected to be included in a business restructuring plan to be compiled later in March for the cash-strapped utility known as TEPCO.

Okuma's solution

March 17, 2012

Evacuated residents of Fukushima no-go area set up temporary town nearby

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120317p2a00m0na013000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The town of Okuma, which entirely falls within the exclusion zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, is planning to establish an "out of town" community as residents' forced evacuations are expected to last a long time.

On March 16, the town's reconstruction planning committee held a meeting in Aizuwakamatsu, drawing up a draft plan to set up a "temporary town" in Iwaki or elsewhere in Fukushima Prefecture, equipped with town office functions, schools and houses by 2016. Some 11,100 residents of Okuma have been evacuated out of the town in the wake of the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March last year.

The move comes as a number of municipalities around the troubled nuclear plant are coming up with various reconstruction plans depending on their circumstances ahead of the expected remapping of evacuation zones in accordance with radiation levels.

The town of Okuma, whose office functions are currently evacuated to Aizuwakamatsu, will conduct a survey on residents' feelings about the proposal and map out a concrete plan as early as in April before starting infrastructure development sometime around 2014.

As most of the town of Okuma is expected to be officially designated as a "difficult to return" zone, whose radiation doses top 50 millisieverts a year, the town's reconstruction planning committee took into consideration members' opinions that the "out of town" community should preferably be set up in an area near the town and whose climate is similar to that of Okuma's. The draft plan also encompassed housing development around Aizuwakamatsu, where more than 3,000 Okuma residents have been evacuated to, as well as a policy to decontaminate the entire Okuma town 10 years later.

Meanwhile, the town of Namie, which falls within the no-go zone and the planned evacuation zone and has most of its 21,000 residents evacuated, also compiled a proposal to develop an "out of town" community on March 14. While the location of such a district will be determined after surveying residents' desires and depending on the progress of decontamination work, the cities of Minamisoma, Iwaki and Nihonmatsu -- where the town's office functions are evacuated to -- are among the candidate sites. In the out-of-town community, housing units, education and other residential service facilities and shops will be established, according to the proposal.

The town of Tomioka, which is expected to be partially designated as a "difficult to return" zone, also held a reconstruction planning committee meeting on March 16, putting forth a draft plan outline to establish housing units in the cities of Iwaki and Koriyama for residents who will not be able to return to Tomioka for a long period of time. The town, whose official population stands at some 15,000, is seeking to have it entirely habitable by fiscal 2020.

The town of Naraha, which is expected to be reorganized into an "evacuation order lifting preparation zone" -- whose yearly radiation doses are 20 millisieverts or less -- drew up an interim reconstruction draft plan. This proposal envisages that the return of some 7,700 residents will start a year later upon the lifting of an evacuation order. It also foresees that all households except for child-raising generations will return to the town and the town's office functions will be fully resumed in the spring of 2014.

In consideration for potential radiation effects on children, however, school classes will be given at a temporary school building -- to be completed in Iwaki this autumn -- until the spring of 2015 and school systems will only be returned to Naraha after decontamination work progresses and the environmental conditions are ready to accommodate children, according to the plan.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

How people feel about compensation

Fukushima evacuees upset over gov't plan for set compensation amounts

Residents evacuated from their nuclear disaster-hit hometowns in Fukushima Prefecture have expressed discontent over the government's plan to compensate them in set amounts.

"I can't accept the uniform compensations," said Ichiro Shiga, 64, a farmer from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Futaba, which hosts the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, after a government panel for screening nuclear disaster reparation disputes presented a compensation policy on March 16.

Shiga, whose wife and grandchild went missing following the March 11, 2011 tsunami, was forced to leave Futaba due to the nuclear disaster without being able to search for his loved ones. He is currently evacuated in Natori, Miyagi Prefecture.

"I'm given up on the idea of returning to my hometown, as a temporary storage facility (for contaminated soil and waste) is likely to be built there," he said. "I can't easily accept the government's compensation policy, which is to make up for our ancestral assets to be lost forever at the same price as before the quake disaster. Our psychological pain would not be compensated for by uniform reparation of 100,000 yen a month (as long as evacuation continues)."

Eiichi Tsukamoto, 70, who is evacuated from the town of Okuma to Aizuwakamatsu, criticized the government's compensation policy, saying that it does not reflect residents' opinions. Okuma is home to

the No. 1 through No. 4 reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and most of the town is expected to be designated as a "difficult to return" zone.

"I'm afraid the lump-sum compensation payments (for those who can not return for the immediate future) would bring down the curtain on the issue. The government is making unilateral decisions without giving us any information. I want the government to incorporate the voices of evacuated residents more in its policy," he said.

Takuro Ajima, 71, a municipal assembly member evacuated from the town of Naraha, whose radiation doses are relatively low compared to other areas, also advocated case-by-case compensation schemes.

"Because houses have been left unattended for a year since the March 11 earthquake, which damaged their roofs and walls, there are many houses in which floors have decayed or mushrooms have popped up on tatami mats. Even if residents can return to their homes after decontamination, it will cost them several million yen in repair expenses per house. I want the government to take individual and door-to-door responses," he said.

Tsutae Ikeda, 66, who is evacuated from the town of Namie to Yamagata Prefecture, showed reluctance to return to his home, which is located nine kilometers from the crippled nuclear plant, saying, "Even if my hometown is designated as a restricted dwelling zone, I'm not going to return there. There's no point in living with my wife in a place where our child can't bring our grandchild to."

Seiichi Funaba, 51, who evacuated from Namie to Kanagawa Prefecture, had to leave both his restaurant in Futaba, five kilometers away from the stricken nuclear plant, and his home seven kilometers away from the facility.

"I want the government to discuss what they are going to do with land and houses. If I could find out what the circumstances will be in three or five years from now, I can make a decision on whether to live here (in Kanagawa Prefecture) forever or to return to my hometown, but I can't do that at the moment," he said.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

[Return to "normal"](#)

Operations resumed at village office near Fukushima nuke plant, schools to follow

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120326p2a00m0na007000c.html>

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima -- Regular operations at the local village office have been resumed and elementary and junior high schools are set to reopen in April at this village that was completely evacuated due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

The village is the second municipality after the town of Hirono that received instructions to evacuate but has now returned its government operations to its original location. Kawauchi's office had been operating out of an evacuation facility in Koriyama.

On the morning of March 26, around 30 of the village's 60 municipal employees appeared at a morning meeting in the village office. While busily handling paperwork brought in from Koriyama, they also attended to villagers who visited for help.

Shinroku Igari, 82, who came to the office for help with health insurance procedures, said, "It's nice that there are a lot of people at the office again." Mayor Yuko Endo was to visit in the evening to give the employees words of encouragement.

The Kawauchi government in January announced it would return to within its borders. Bringing back its government functions, it has called for those residents who can to come back, but currently only around 230 of its 3,000 residents have done so. Radiation levels in the residential parts of the village are said to be comparatively low. On April 1, a review is planned for the designated evacuation zones in the area.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Distress money

March 28, 2012

Prefecture to fund distressed Fukushima victims

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120328_09.html

Fukushima Prefecture says it will make cash payments to people in municipalities not eligible for full compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company for the emotional distress caused by last year's nuclear accident.

The prefecture says it will pay 200,000 yen, or about 2,400 dollars, to each pregnant woman and to children 18 and younger in 17 municipalities in the Aizu region of western Fukushima.

It also says it will pay about 1,200 dollars each to expectant mothers and children in 9 other municipalities in southern Fukushima.

TEPCO has promised payments of about 2,400 dollars each to pregnant women and children in those 9 municipalities, which are excluded by state panel guidelines from receiving higher sums.

The prefecture says it will also pay about 480 dollars each to everyone else in Aizu and southern Fukushima.

The money will come from a fund set up by the prefecture for the nuclear accident victims. The central government has offered to contribute about 480 million dollars to the fund.

TEPCO wants more money

March 29, 2012

TEPCO seeks additional public money injection

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120329_31.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has asked for more public funds from a government-backed entity to avoid negative net worth and to compensate the victims of the nuclear crisis at the facility.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, on Thursday asked the entity set up to help compensate the victims for one trillion yen, or over 12 billion dollars, for capital reinforcement. The utility also requested about 10 billion dollars to bolster its reserves for compensation.

Approval of the requests would put the total amount of public funds injected into the utility at more than 40 billion dollars.

The requests are part of a business renewal plan that TEPCO is compiling. The utility gave up on completing the plan this month, due to key issues such as the size of the share in TEPCO that it will allow the government to take in exchange for the funds.

TEPCO also opposes the government's plan to reshuffle the firm's management.

TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa expressed hope that the utility wants to do business in the private sector while implementing management reforms.

TEPCO faces financial difficulties amid increasing fuel costs for thermal power plants. Without state support, the utility's liabilities could exceed its assets during the fiscal year starting in April.

Okuma doesnt want to be divided

March 29, 2012

Fukushima town seeks long-term designation as no-go zone

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120329p2a00m0na016000c.html>

A Fukushima Prefecture town affected by the ongoing nuclear crisis is set to ask the national government to designate the whole town as a zone where residents will unlikely be able to return in the foreseeable future.

Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe announced the plan during a session of the municipal assembly held at the temporary town office in Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 28. Okuma will be the first municipality in nuclear disaster-hit areas to ask that its entire area be designated as such.

After listening to the opinions of assembly members as well as local residents, the town will consult with the central government. "We'd like to coordinate views within the town by the end of April," the mayor said.

The national government is considering re-designating evacuation zones in 11 cities, towns and villages in the prefecture. Specifically, it plans to reorganize affected areas into three levels -- seriously contaminated zones where residents are highly unlikely to be allowed to return in the foreseeable future, restricted zones where residents can temporarily return and zones where residents are likely to return once decontamination has been done and the living environment improved.

Over 90 percent of Okuma residents live in areas that the national government plans to designate as zones where they are unlikely to be able to return in the near future.

Therefore, Mayor Watanabe wants the entire town to be designated as such a zone because he does not want the town's community to be divided.

He also said all residents should receive compensation for the nuclear crisis under the same standards. In a related development, the Futaba Municipal Government in Fukushima Prefecture is poised to refuse any re-designation of evacuation zones in the town.

A national government official visited the municipal government's temporary office in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, on March 28 and met with Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa, but stopped short of offering any specific redesignation plan.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Some can, some can't

March 30, 2012

Govt. reviewing Fukushima no-go zones

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120330_29.html

Residents of 2 communities near the troubled nuclear power plant in Fukushima will be allowed to visit their homes freely starting on Sunday, for the first time in a year.

The prospect emerged on Friday night as a government nuclear disaster task force led by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda decided to review no-entry areas of 3 municipalities near the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

At present, areas within 20 kilometers from the plant are designated a no-entry zone.

Under the new rules, the government will help residents return home as soon as possible in areas where cumulative radiation exposure is certain to be less than 20 millisieverts per year.

The government will ask residents to keep away for the interim from areas where radiation exposure is feared to exceed 20 millisieverts per year.

Residents will have to stay out of areas for a long time in principle where exposure levels are higher than 50 millisieverts per year.

The nuclear disaster task force discussed how to review no-entry and evacuation zones covering 11 municipalities.

The government decided to lift entry restrictions for no-go parts of Tamura City and Kawauchi Village on

Sunday.

Restrictions for off-limits parts of Minamisoma City will be lifted on April 16th.

The government will continue to review the current demarcation of evacuation zones in the remaining 8 municipalities.

Compensation for all

All Fukushima residents to get compensation thanks to prefectural gov't

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120330p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- All 2 million residents of Fukushima Prefecture will receive compensation after the prefectural government decided March 29 to provide residents living outside the evacuation zones with redress in lieu of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) over the nuclear disaster.

Shirakawa, Aizuwakamatsu and other cities, towns and villages with relatively low levels of radiation agreed to accept the prefectural government's compensation proposal, But some municipalities maintain that TEPCO should primarily compensate them and the amounts offered by the prefectural government are small.

During a meeting with municipal governments, the prefectural government offered to pay 200,000 yen to every pregnant woman and child under 18 in the 17 municipalities in the Aizu region even though it is not an evacuation zone; as well as 100,000 yen to each pregnant woman and minor in nine cities, towns and villages in southern Fukushima Prefecture that are also outside the evacuation zone. In addition, TEPCO has offered to pay 200,000 yen each to all pregnant women and children in these nine cities, towns and villages. The prefectural government also offered to pay 40,000 yen to all other residents of these areas.

The amounts are about half of TEPCO's offers to pay 400,000 yen to 600,000 yen to all pregnant women and children and 80,000 yen to all other residents in Fukushima, Koriyama and 21 other cities, towns and villages.

The prefectural government will allocate about 30 billion yen by using a portion of a 40.4 billion yen nuclear disaster relief fund, which has been created with state subsidies, plus 3 billion yen in donations from TEPCO. The utility's compensation to areas outside the evacuation zones totals about 210 billion yen.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato said his government decided to pay compensation to residents outside the evacuation zones so as not to cause area differences in monetary compensation and hamper reconstruction efforts.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

People vs TEPCO

March 31, 2012

14 nuke disaster evacuation zone residents file 265 million yen suit against TEPCO

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120331p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Fourteen residents of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, have filed suit with the Tokyo District Court against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), demanding some 265 million yen in compensation for what they call mental suffering caused by radiation exposure fears and life in temporary housing.

The suit is believed to be the first class action suit against the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant over the ongoing nuclear crisis.

The plaintiffs, representing five households and aged 20 to 82, evacuated from Iitate after the village was included in the nuclear disaster evacuation zone and now live in temporary accommodations in Fukushima, Sendai and other locations.

A government panel setting guidelines for financial compensation for victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster says every person experiencing mental suffering should receive 100,000 yen per month for the first six months of the crisis and 50,000 yen per month for the next six months.

The plaintiffs, however, are demanding 300,000 yen per month for two years starting from the beginning of the crisis, plus 10 million yen per head of household, stressing the mental and physical suffering they've experienced as their lives have been thrown into disarray by the evacuation, and the constant fear of radioactive contamination.

The plaintiffs say they filed the class action suit against TEPCO because the government's compensation mediation center has for the most part failed to secure larger amounts than those stipulated under the guidelines, and managed to reach a compromise in only a limited number of cases.

One of the plaintiffs is Shuko Ichizawa, 58, who evacuated to the city of Fukushima soon after realizing a longtime dream to open a coffee shop in the village. "I don't know what to do because the village where I was born, grew up and achieved my lifelong goal was destroyed. Is only 100,000 yen compensation enough for that?" he said at a news conference before the suit was filed.

Click here for the original Japanese story

When can they fish again?

March 31, 2012

Fukushima fishermen hopeless after nuke contamination postpones fishing season

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120331p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Fishermen in this prefecture's Okuaizu region were left hopeless after radioactive cesium exceeding the allowable limit detected in some river fish forced them to postpone this year's fishing season indefinitely.

"This river's sweetfish is exceptional," Kiroku Gono, 65, the head of a local fisheries cooperative, said as he posted a sign reading "No Fishing" along the Nojiri River in Okuaizu on March 30. "When I send it to my son and his wife who live far away, they are always pleased."

The fisheries cooperative of the town of Kaneyama and Showa village near the Nojiri River was forced to postpone this year's mountain stream fishing season, which was set to begin on April 1, after fish samples caught in the river in mid-March registered 119 to 139 becquerels of radioactive cesium per kilogram.

The readings exceed the new government-imposed provisional limit, which requires that cesium in regular food items not exceed 100 becquerels per kilogram.

The readings left many fishermen stunned, however. Furthermore, the Nojiri River runs some 130 kilometers away from the damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Just before the opening of the 2011 season, fish samples from the Nojiri River measured only around 50 becquerels of radioactive cesium per kilogram -- far lower than the then-allowable limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram. The fishermen were allowed to open the season as usual.

However, due to harmful rumors and other related reasons, the number of visitors to the river -- which was popular with anglers for its clean streams -- decreased drastically. The local fishermen were counting on a comeback this season.

In the beginning of March this year, in preparation for the opening of the fishing season and in consideration to the new, stricter cesium limits, fishermen submitted iwana (char) samples to be tested for radiation contamination. The results were positive -- the fish measured between 45 to 66 becquerels per kilogram, below the new safety level.

Gonoi and other members of the fisheries cooperative were relieved -- it had been another confirmation that the Okuaizu fish was safe. However, on March 28, shortly after he began sending fishing tickets to regular customers, he was notified that the most recent fish samples from mid-March measured 19 to 39 becquerels per kilogram over the 100-becquerel limit.

"It was decided by the government so the only thing we can do is accept it," Gonoi says. "We have to prevent the possibility that children eat the fish and something happens to them."

The decision to postpone the fishing season, however, was a harsh development that will affect not only fishermen but also local inns targeting visiting anglers.

Aerial radiation doses within the Nojiri River area are not high, and many locals and officials wonder what led to the recent high contamination readings.

"We are not exactly sure why cesium has accumulated in the fish. It could be that they were contaminated through the food chain," an official with the Fukushima Prefecture's fisheries division said.

The ban will be lifted if fish samples measure below the allowable limit three consecutive times. For the moment, however, there is no clear prospect of when this may happen.

Meanwhile, the fisheries cooperative is skeptical about the forthcoming sweetfish fishing season, set to begin in June. "As the water temperature rises, so too do the fishes' metabolic rates. It is possible that the fish will excrete the cesium," Gonoi said.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Please come home

Fukushima village prepares for repopulation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120402_16.html

A village designated as an evacuation zone in the aftermath of last year's nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant is calling on its residents to come home.

The central government lifted its ban on entering Kawauchi Village in Fukushima Prefecture on Sunday, allowing free access to all parts of the village. Almost all of the village's approximately 3,000 residents fled after the accident. **About 2,700, or 90 percent, have not yet returned for fear of radiation contamination and other concerns.**

The village held a ceremony at its municipal office on Monday to formally appoint employees to their new positions. The village government has had to operate outside the evacuation zone until recently.

At the ceremony, Mayor Yuko Endo said the village should make progress toward reconstruction one step at a time.

The village plans to provide homes in areas that have been determined to be safe. It says it will press ahead with decontamination work and job creation to be ready for the residents' return.

Mayor of village near the stricken nuclear plant encourages employees

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120402p2a00m0na005000c.html>

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima -- The mayor of this village located near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant gave words of encouragement to employees on April 2 as they prepared for the new fiscal year.

Speaking to all 73 employees, Mayor Yuko Endo said, "Let us work honestly to make a new village." The village was previously entirely evacuated, but in March it moved its government functions back to the village office. A new recovery department has been set up for the village, and Endo handed around 50 employees their new appointment papers.

"It was a year that reminded us of things important to people, like the goodness of our village and what a village is," said Endo. He mentioned radiation decontamination and job creation as tasks for the village to face.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

A new start really?

April 3, 2012

'New start' for nuclear evacuees / But residents concerned over delayed decontamination, rebuilding

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120402004436.htm>

Many residents of Tamura and Kawauchi, both in Fukushima Prefecture, have temporarily returned home since the no-entry restriction on their communities was lifted Sunday in line with a review of evacuation zoning established after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"Today is a new start," 67-year-old Akiko Tsuboi said as she left by car for her house in Tamura's Miyakojimachi-Furumichi area, about 20 kilometers from her temporary housing unit, at 8:30 a.m. Sunday. She reached her two-story wooden house about 30 minutes after passing a checkpoint.

Tsuboi lived in the house, and raised three children there, from the time of her marriage to her husband, Masaya, until they evacuated on March 12, 2011.

Inside the house, she found mold on the floor caused by a leak in the roof. She did not place flowers on the family altar during a previous visit because she did not want to leave them to wilt. Sunday, however, she put out flowers, saying, "I'm home."

A calendar on a wall was still at the page for March 2011 and a clock had stopped.

Unlike previous temporary visits, which were restricted to four hours including traveling time, there is now no time limit on residents' stay. However, Tsuboi could not use the toilets because the septic tank needed to be checked, so she left her house at 2 p.m.

About 380 people from Tamura, or just under 1 percent of the entire population, lived in the former no-entry zone within a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled plant. About 350 people from Kawauchi lived in the zone, or about 12 percent of that area's population.

Kawauchi returned its public administration functions, which were temporarily shifted to Koriyama in the prefecture, to the village on March 26. Schools will also resume soon.

However, decontamination work in the former no-entry zone is behind schedule, and work on water and other infrastructure has not yet started.

Areas with annual radiation exposure of 20 millisieverts or lower are being prepared for residents' return. The central government plans to complete decontamination work this year in parts of those areas with relatively high radiation.

Such work in the emergency evacuation preparation zone, which was from 20 kilometers to 30 kilometers from the plant, is also behind schedule due to ice and snow. The restriction on this area was lifted in September, but many residents worry decontamination will not finish as planned.

Osamu Sudo, a counselor of the Cabinet Office's support team for evacuees from the nuclear crisis, has admitted the limitations of the measurements on which the review of evacuation zoning was based.

Sudo said at a press conference on Friday: "The government divided areas based on rough measurements of radiation levels.

But it's necessary to ascertain more detailed radiation readings to lift the restrictions and allow residents to return home."

This review is based on measurements of radiation levels taken from a plane. However, these measurements roughly estimate **radiation levels one meter off the ground**, based on midair sampling. They do not identify "hot spots," specific locations with high radiation levels.

The government plans to measure radiation levels especially in places many people gather, such as schools and hospitals, and take steps to decrease as much as possible the radiation exposure of the residents who return home.

Michiaki Kai, a professor at Oita University of Nursing and Health Sciences, said: "There are some locations with relatively high radiation levels in the areas where residents were allowed to return. While exchanging sufficient information with residents, the government should make plans for measurement and decontamination, and take measurements to decrease radiation exposure."

Is it safe?

April 7, 2012

Schools reopen in Kawauchi

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120406004779.htm>

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima--Municipal nursery, primary and middle schools in Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, held a joint entrance ceremony Friday after the government lifted an evacuation order on parts of the village following a review of evacuation zones established after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

It is the first time that education facilities in Futaba County, where the crippled plant is located, returned to their original locations and resumed classes.

Three students enrolled at Kawauchi Primary School, while five students enrolled at Kawauchi Middle School. Eight students enrolled at Kawauchi Nursery School.

Before the crisis, 14 primary school students and 17 middle school students had planned to enroll at the Kawauchi schools. However, the number significantly declined after many students decided to enroll at schools in areas they had been evacuated to. Now, the primary school has a total of 16 students, while the middle school has a total of 14 students. The nursery school has eight students, all of whom enrolled Friday.

The joint entrance ceremony was held at the village community center. At the ceremony, 12-year-old middle school student Haruna Endo said, "There will be some concerns and inconveniences in our new life, but I want to overcome them with my friends."

Endo returned to the village with her family in late March. Her mother Yumiko, 38, said she decided to return home because her daughter wanted to. "There are still many problems, but I'm a little relieved to be able to be here today," she said.

The government lifted the emergency evacuation preparation zone status on western Kawauchi at the end of September, but most of the village's 3,000 residents have not returned. Eastern Kawauchi remains within the 20-kilometer no-entry zone.

The village has one primary and middle school each, both of which were located in the emergency evacuation preparation zone. Even after the evacuation order was lifted, both schools continued classes in Koriyama within the prefecture.

However, the mayor declared at the end of January that the village's administrative functions would return to the village, returning to their original office at the end of March.

As of Thursday, 545 residents had returned home.

To resume classes, the village prioritized decontaminating houses and other facilities for households with children who wished to go to school in the village.

The radiation levels around the schools were 0.114 to 0.16 microsieverts per hour as of Friday morning, lower than the 0.23 microsieverts per hour government standard for decontamination.

Can Japan rely on energy savings ?

April 11, 2012

Kansai Electric Power Co. vice president predicts tough power situation in summer

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120411p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) Vice President Shigeki Iwane said on April 10 that this summer's electricity supplies will only just be enough even with the reactivation of two nuclear reactors.

"There is no doubt it will be tougher than last year. Looking at current supply and demand, there will be almost no cases where we do not call for savings on electricity. **Even if two reactors are reactivated, it will be tough,**" said Iwane, indicating that even if the No. 3 and 4 reactors of the Oi nuclear power plant were restarted, the power company will call for cuts in power usage this summer.

The comments were made to reporters after Iwane attended an energy strategy meeting held by Osaka prefecture and the city. It was the first time that a KEPCO executive mentioned the possibility of calling for cuts in energy use this summer.

Regarding energy supply and demand this summer, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy and KEPCO have shown calculations predicting the possibility of a 7.6 percent shortage if there is a similar amount of energy demand to last year's summer, and a 19.6 percent shortage if there is a hot summer like in 2010. In a case like last year, if the two reactors at the Oi plant, with a generating capacity of 2.36 million kilowatts, were restarted, a 0.9 percent surplus of energy is predicted. However, last year's demand came after a call for a 15 percent cut in energy use, and KEPCO is therefore thought to have come to the conclusion that this year will need a similar call for cuts in power use.

The calculations predict that electricity shortages would occur from late June through September. Last year's calls for cuts in energy use were in effect from July, and Iwane said, "I think there is a need to talk about saving power from an early point."

Horses back in Fukushima - What are we supposed to make of it ?

Evacuated horses return to Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120415_10.html

Horses evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture after the nuclear accident are returning to their homes for a performance in a traditional event.

Minamisoma City sent 52 horses used in the performance to a town in Hokkaido, northern Japan. It had become difficult to get hay for them and many owners themselves left after the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The central Fukushima region of Soma has held the summer festival called "Soma-noma-oi" for many years. The festival is said to have originated more than 1,000 years ago for the training of warriors.

Eight horses arrived in Minamisoma on Saturday after a drive of 17 hours in a special trailer. The owners of the horses came to see them after 8 months of separation.

The remaining 44 horses will return home by the end of May to take part in the festival in July.

Guided tours now

Minami-Soma planning reconstruction aid tours

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120417004838.htm>

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima--The Minami-Soma municipal government plans to offer people a firsthand look at a city affected by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant by hosting tours to stay in and walk around the city.

The no-entry and expanded evacuation zone designations affecting the city--established following the outbreak of the crisis at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant--were lifted Monday.

The city government plans to start the tours, dubbed "disaster area reconstruction support tours," as early as June.

The city is aiming to bring back tourists and is even planning to let people experience nuclear hazards by providing them with dosimeters, according to a city official.

Tour participants will walk along the coastal area in the Haramachi district, which is mostly vacant following the March 11 tsunami.

They will also visit rice fields that have been neglected because of high radiation counts in the air and soil after the crisis.

The tours will be carried out by volunteers, and dosimeters can be rented if they are requested, according to the official.

Even with the no-entry zone status lifted in the city, spending the night in the former no-entry zone is not permitted.

As basic services such as tap water and washrooms are not yet available in the area, the city has not decided yet whether this area will be open for tourists, according to the city.

The city previously boasted about 1.6 million people visiting every year for sunbathing and swimming and the Soma Nomaoui festival in July, which is designated by the government as an important intangible folk cultural asset. However, "we had almost no tourists last year," a city tourism and exchange official said.

The city government plans to provide travel agencies with a 2,000 yen subsidy for each person, in groups of 10 or more, who stays and eats in the city. There have been inquiries by several companies, according to the city.

"In a normal year, our rice fields would be covered with rice seedlings in June," said Yuki Inamura, a 31-year-old volunteer tour guide. "I hope people will learn that we shouldn't allow such a disaster to happen again by seeing firsthand the actual state of our city."
(Apr. 18, 2012)

see also on NHK

Film "Guiding through disaster" :

Daily life in Japan

Tuesday, April 17, 2012

THE ZEIT GIST

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20120417zg.html>

Bread and becquerels: a year of living dangerously

Nuclear disaster has turned family routine on its head

By GIANNI SIMONE

My New Year's resolution back in January was to survive this year, and many more to come, which means keeping myself and my family as far from harm's way as possible.

Loud and clear: Demonstrators offer their thoughts on the antics of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the company behind the leaking Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, at a protest in Tokyo in September. GIANNI SIMONE



Unfortunately, staying healthy in the atomic age is far from easy, particularly after the nuclear accident in Fukushima. 2012 is already showing the telltale signs of radiation exposure — a weird one-day excrescence at the end of February certainly doesn't bode well for the future.

My overall impression is that without decisive intervention from the central government, the do-it-yourself approach to survival is the only one that really works. God helps those who help themselves, after all. You don't need to be a believer to agree, but who knows, perhaps a touch of faith might help.

One year has passed since the nuclear accident at Fukushima, and very few things seem to have improved — or even changed, for that matter — since last March. I am among those who initially believed the reassuring words of those people who, sometimes in good faith, downplayed the risks of possible radioactive contamination. Also, as my family lives in Yokohama, I rather naively felt that we were a safe enough distance away from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

I began to suspect something was wrong when I heard about groups of parents who were organizing in the Kanto region to put pressure on the government and local authorities to come clean about the true extent of radioactive contamination from the accident.

My wife, who had never been interested in politics or grassroots activism, went as far as to join the Yokohama no Kodomotachi wo Hoshano Kara Mamoru Kai (Group to Protect Yokohama Children from Radiation), an organization founded last May by Toshiko Yasuda, a 41-year-old housewife who was worried about the food her daughter was being served at her elementary school. Considering how uncooperative both the PTA and the Yokohama City Council were on this matter (the headmaster at my

children's school candidly admitted to astonished parents that he was risking his neck ("*kubi ga kakatteiru*") on the matter and had no intention of sacrificing his career), many people decided to take matters into their hands — at least those who had not been hypnotized by the relentless "don't worry, be happy" mantra.

Looking back at the life my family used to lead before that fateful Friday afternoon — when the earthquake ruined the pizza party I was enjoying with friends — it's frightening how much it has changed.

For one thing, there's my daily diet. All of a sudden spinach and other risky foods are out, while apples are in. We have also added apple pectin to our diet because it helps sweep out radioactive dust particles from the intestines (apparently it was used extensively after the Chernobyl disaster).

We now know stuff we did not really care about before. We feel like last year we took a crash course in science (e.g. cesium, strontium and plutonium's half-lives, and their effects of the human body), technology (how to use and read a Geiger counter) and history (how the triad of national government, bureaucracy and industry ruthlessly imposed nuclear energy as the fuel source of choice, and later launched a wide-ranging construction program that over the years has turned Japan into the world's third nuclear power).

Indeed, keeping out of reach of the long arms of nuclear death, or even trying to limit the damage, is a 24/7 job. Wearing masks and brushing our clothes after coming home have become as natural as washing our hands or taking a shower. My wife even tried to make my sons wear a pair of protective glasses, but they were deemed too ugly by our fashion-conscious kids, and were unceremoniously relegated to the bottom drawer.

Living in the nuclear age also means avoiding little pleasures that until now we had taken for granted. My children (and some of their classmates), for instance, will not join their school trip to Nikko because of the worrying news we have heard about contamination in that area.

The person whose daily routine has changed the most, though, is my wife. In the morning she has to prepare our sons' lunch boxes (because their school has proven to be completely unreliable on food control matters). Then she sits in front of the computer and reads the many mails that other members of her group send daily with radiation-related news, data and links. She does the same after dinner. In the afternoon, she may take part in group studies, listen to an expert comparing the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters, or meet her friends to plot another guerrilla action — like when they smuggled food out of school and got it checked for contamination (something the principal had refused to do).

Obviously one of the aspects of daily life we are most concerned about is food, considering that more than once contaminated goods have found their way into supermarkets and school lunches nationwide.

Once upon a time the Japanese used to be proud of their local food's supposed superior quality (mislabeling and other assorted scandals be damned), and would aggressively check foreign products for safety. Sadly that golden age is over.

Since agricultural and food standards were revised in 2000, all products must be labeled with the name of the producer and place of origin, as well as other useful information. A new tracking system allows people to trace the place of origin of most fresh produce, beef and eggs, to name a few. Lot numbers on packages allow you to track down farm names and their addresses, among other things.

Milk is a little trickier because most companies buy it from different places. So often what you are actually drinking is a blend of different varieties. The best thing to do in such cases is to avoid the stuff altogether. At our local supermarket they have Dai Aso milk from Kumamoto. In other places you can find milk from other southern prefectures (e.g. Shiro Bara from Hyogo — even though for my wife Kansai is already too close to home). As for yogurt, we were lucky enough to get some milk enzymes from a neighbor, so now we make it ourselves. It actually tastes more like cheese than yogurt proper — which makes it even better, if you ask me.

Thankfully, such slogans as "support the Tohoku farmers" have long ago disappeared from store shelves. Hopefully people now understand that if there is someone who should support them, that would be the government, which caused the problem in the first place.

In the meantime, my wife spends countless hours calling the companies' toll-free numbers, requesting all manner of information on food origin and composition — stuff they are required to give by law — and lecturing the poor operators on what and how things should be done.

Then comes shopping itself. We used to buy everything at a couple of supermarkets nearby, but now we've had to diversify.

Of course, each area in Japan has different supermarket chains, so it is difficult to generalize. As for us, our store of choice (OK Mart) is still cheap and reliable enough that we do most of our grocery shopping there. I have also heard of people who have set up regular accounts with department stores in distant regions, or ask friends or relatives to send goods that are difficult to find here. The *takkyūbin* delivery service is so cheap and fast that is actually worthwhile.

To be honest, if you want to limit the risk of contamination as much as possible, you should avoid almost anything coming not only from Tohoku but the Greater Tokyo area too. That's why online shopping is an excellent, albeit time-consuming solution.

Toto Seikatsu Club (www.tohto-coop.or.jp/), for instance, checks each and every product for cesium-134 and 137, as well as radioactive iodine. They will not sell anything that exceeds 2 becquerels of radioactivity per kilogram. Here you can buy such "risky" food as green tea, spinach, *renkon* (lotus root) and mushrooms, if you really can't resist the temptation.

Tamachan Shop (www.rakuten.ne.jp/gold/kyunan/) is based in Miyazaki, Kyushu, and is another reliable source of groceries. As for rice, we now use Kome Shonen (www.rakuten.co.jp/kome-syounen/)

On the other hand, Radish Boya (www.radishbo-ya.co.jp/index.html), which is very popular because it offers organic vegetables and other additive-free foods, has recently been blacklisted by my wife and her

more hard-core friends because there seems to be a discrepancy between what they say and what they actually do.

Now my house looks like a warehouse, with cartons of bottled water piled up high and other stuff stashed under the bed. The house, though, currently feels emptier than ever because my wife has decided to take our sons to Italy and spend the "radioactive pollen" season with my mother.

Actually, this is hardly uncommon these days: Okayama and several other prefectures in southern Japan now offer temporary lodgings to "nuclear refugees" from the risky areas, and more than a few people have made the most of this opportunity. Mothers and kids (the father typically has to stay home to work) can spend months in nice apartments, and the rent is only about ¥30,000.

So for the last month I have regressed to single status, and spend my quiet evenings watching movies. The other night, for example, I watched "On the Beach," the 1959 post-apocalyptic film about the last days of life on Earth following a nuclear war . . .

To many people all the above may sound a little paranoid. I assure you, it is not. It is just common sense, and everybody living in Japan should be taking precautions if they want to limit the risk of contamination.

Unfortunately, the biggest problem with all the information in this article (useful websites, online shopping sites, toll-free numbers, etc.) is that it is all in Japanese. If you don't understand the local lingo, my advice is to get help from friends, or invest in a Japanese partner, like I did.

Send comments on this issue and story ideas to community@japantimes.co.jp

"Temporary Tomiokas"

April 22, 2012

Making a home away from home / Tomioka plans to create 3 temporary towns to encourage residents' return

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120421003092.htm>

FUKUSHIMA--The town government of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, which is located entirely within the no-entry zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, plans to create three "temporary Tomiokas" for evacuated residents, it has been learned.

The plan aims at preserving the town residents' communities, which were dispersed after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the plant. According to a draft of the plan, the three locations will be in the cities of Iwaki and Koriyama in the prefecture, and a part of Tomioka where radiation is low.

Town government officials revealed the plan on Friday at a town committee meeting to discuss reconstruction plan.

However, it is expected to be difficult to realize the project, as consultations with relevant municipalities have not progressed.

According to the plan, the Tomioka town government will first set up its headquarters in the town. It will then prepare for the future return of its residents by conducting decontamination work, readying water supply and sewage systems, and encouraging the relocation of residences in areas hit by the March 2011 tsunami to higher ground.

For residents unable to return to the town in the near future, the town government will encourage them to live in temporary "satellite Tomiokas" in Iwaki and Koriyama.

The town government will ask residents to move back to Tomioka when they are ready to return.

The town's population as of the end of March was 14,608, including about 4,000 in Koriyama, where the town government is temporarily located, and about 5,000 in Iwaki.

In Tomioka's planned temporary sites in Iwaki and Koriyama, the town government intends to set up public housing, hospitals, schools and nursing homes for its evacuees.

According to the plan, the town government will name one site after sakura (cherry), the town's tree; one after tsutsuji (azalea), the town's flower; and one after sekirei (wagtail), the town's bird.

The original Tomioka is thus expected to be called Sakura Tomioka, while its temporary locations will be Tsutsuji Tomioka in Iwaki, and Sekirei Tomioka in Koriyama.

Meanwhile, the central government is expected to reclassify the town into three zones.

Zones where accumulated radiation exposure exceeds 50 millisieverts per year will be designated as "zones where residency is prohibited for an extended period."

Zones with annual exposure from 20 to less than 50 millisieverts per year will be designated as "zones with restricted residency," where residents will be permitted to make brief visits to their houses while being urged to remain evacuated.

Zones where radiation exposure is below 20 millisieverts per year will be designated as "zones preparing to lift restrictions on residents' return."

Sakura Tomioka will be created by selecting areas with low radiation from the "zones preparing to lift restrictions on residents' return," with a decontamination target of 1 millisievert or less per year.

In the areas, the town government plans to prepare collective housing and other facilities.

However, an area where the town office was previously located is not likely to be included in Sakura Tomioka because radiation there is still relatively high.

In the two satellite towns in Koriyama and Iwaki, the town government plans to ask its residents to move from temporary housing units or privately rented houses to shared or individual houses

The town government will consider establishing medical facilities and water supply and sewage systems independently, to avoid overburdening the Koriyama and Iwaki city governments. It also will conduct a survey to determine its residents' intentions regarding the plan prior to compiling the town's reconstruction plan in July.

However, the town government has yet to explain details of the plan to the two city governments, a town official said.

"We'd like to consult with the central and prefectural governments as well as the relevant local governments to flesh out the details of the plan," the official said.

Among local governments that have relocated their offices, the town governments of Okuma and Futaba--both near the crippled power plant--also are considering creating temporary towns in other municipalities.

The town government of Okuma has announced a plan to establish a "temporary Okuma" in Iwaki or municipalities around Iwaki.

The town government of Namie also is planning to prepare communities in the cities of Iwaki and Minami-Soma.

Concerning such moves by municipalities, Iwaki Mayor Takao Watanabe said Thursday: "The city of Iwaki has also suffered serious damage due to the earthquake and tsunami. The housing shortage and strain on medical and nursing services are becoming more severe.

"The central government should create a road map for municipalities of Futaba County [in the prefecture] that indicates a timeline for the residents to return to their original municipalities.

"We don't know how long we'll need to support them," Watanabe added.

A senior Koriyama city official on Friday declined to comment about the Tomioka's plan.

Out-of-court settlement for rice farmers?

April 22, 2012

3 Fukushima farmers seeking 3.4 billion yen for decontamination ask for mediation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120421p2a00m0na007000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Three rice farmers in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, and elsewhere on April 20 asked for mediation for an out-of-court settlement as they seek around 3.4 billion yen for field decontamination fees and other purposes.

The farmers asked for mediation from a center for settling disputes on compensation for nuclear-related losses. The three farm 10 to 40 hectares of land located 57 to 82 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The farmers have been told by the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to decontaminate their lands and had their planting restricted.

As they have their own markets they sell to and have almost no dealings with agricultural cooperatives, the farmers seek individual treatment from Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled nuclear power plant. However, they say they were refused by the company for the reason that it does "not imagine compensation for farmers besides through agricultural cooperatives."

Bracing for a difficult summer

April 23, 2012

Firms preparing for summer without nuclear power

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120423_17.html

Companies across Japan are preparing for expected power cuts this summer as the country's only operational nuclear reactor is set to go offline for a scheduled check-up next month.

Industrialized Kansai region, serviced by Kansai Electric Power Company, is expected to be hit especially hard by power shortages. The Osaka-based utility depends more on nuclear energy than other power companies.

Electrical wire maker Sumitomo Electric Industries plans to install in-house power generators at 4 factories in Kansai region by June.

Housing maker Daiwa House Industry says it will introduce 1,000 sets of lithium-ion batteries at its plants and offices in the Kansai area and other parts of the country. It will store electricity in the batteries late at night, for use later in the day.

Drugmaker Takeda Pharmaceutical will keep its factory in the region in operation through the upcoming May holidays. It also plans to boost production in other regions during the summer to make up for the production decline in the Kansai area.

Many firms say they are having difficulties coming up with concrete measures amid the unclear outlook for electricity demand this summer. An increasing number of businesses are calling on the government to provide summer forecasts as soon as possible.

No decent evacuation measures despite Fukushima's disaster

No evacuation plans for 4.42 million residents near nuclear plants

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120423p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Even after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, almost all local governments in Hokkaido and 20 other prefectures are without comprehensive evacuation measures for a total of about 4.42 million residents within 30 kilometers of nuclear power plants, according to a tally by the Mainichi Shimbun.

Some of the municipalities are beset with potential traffic congestion and other problems and question if such evacuation programs are feasible in the first place. The Mainichi tally comes as **the central government is trying to restart idled nuclear reactors despite the absence of sufficient evacuation measures across the densely populated country.**

In the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, in March this year an expert panel of the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan drew up a midterm report in which the government had decided to expand emergency planning zones (EPZs) within a radius of 8 to 10 kilometers of nuclear power plants to the 30-kilometer radius urgent protection action planning zone (UPZ).

A proposed nuclear regulatory agency will formally designate such zones and carry out simulations.

According to Kenji Tani, an associate professor of human geography at Saitama University, the combined population within 30 kilometers of 54 nuclear reactors, including four now-defunct nuclear reactors at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant, comes to about 4.42 million, based on the 2005 census. About 930,000 people live within 30 kilometers of the Tokai No. 2 Power Station owned by the Japan Atomic Power Co. in Ibaraki Prefecture.

The Mainichi contacted Hokkaido, Kyoto, Nagasaki and 18 other prefectures which host nuclear power plants or some of whose municipalities are located within a 30-kilometer radius of nuclear power plants.

Only Hokkaido says it has an evacuation plan to transport 75,000 residents near the Tomari Nuclear Power Plant in a fleet of 1,500 buses. Excluding Gifu Prefecture, which has no population in the 30-kilometer zone, the 19 other prefectures say they are contemplating evacuation measures or will study such steps. Ibaraki Prefecture says it is "very difficult" to map out evacuation measures.

Many of the prefectures in the Mainichi survey are projecting evacuations by car. Due to a small number of roads and bridges in these regions, areas with sizable populations and limited evacuation routes may face heavy traffic congestion and leave evacuees stranded.

Only Saga and Nagasaki prefectures have secured possible evacuation centers for residents within 30 kilometers of the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant belonging to Kyushu Electric Power Co. and assigned them by area to such places as schools and community halls outside the 30-kilometer zone. Both prefectures consider private vehicles as an emergency means of transportation in principle but will study in the future how they are going to evacuate residents without cars.

The survey also revealed that most prefectures have yet to consider or implement steps to evacuate inpatients and elderly people in need of nursing care. Only Fukuoka Prefecture, where a portion of its western edge falls within the 30-kilometer zone, says it can accommodate inpatients at designated hospitals in case of disaster.

Nagasaki Prefecture says it is difficult for them to find hospitals with empty beds. Shimane Prefecture says it is necessary to evacuate residents in cooperation with municipalities across prefectural borders but that there is a limit to what local governments alone can do to coordinate evacuation plans.

Is TEPCO's rate hike acceptable ?

April 28, 2012

Consumer Affairs Agency to examine TEPCO electricity rate hike for households

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120428p2a00m0na013000c.html>

The Consumer Affairs Agency is set to examine whether a 10 percent electricity charge hike for households planned by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is appropriate, agency officials said.

The agency is expected to consult with certified public accountants over an application to be filed by TEPCO for the planned rate raise.

Jin Matsubara, state minister for consumer affairs, underscored the importance of considering the issue cautiously.

"The rate hike won't win the public's understanding unless the utility thoroughly rationalizes its operations, including a substantial cut in its personnel expenses. Moreover, we must prevent such a hike from adversely affecting people's livelihoods," he said.

Another agency official said it cannot easily grant TEPCO permission to increase its electricity rates for households.

"We can't give the green light to the application unless the utility meets conditions that will satisfy consumers, such as disclosure of information on why it must raise the charges. **We just can't accept TEPCO's claims as they are.** We're determined to analyze TEPCO's situation to find bases for determining whether the 10 percent hike is too much," the official said.

The hike is part of a comprehensive special business plan that TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima No.1 nuclear power station, and the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund submitted to Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano on April 27. The plan outlines the financially troubled utility's specific plan to rehabilitate itself.

As a rule, the agency and other government regulators refer applications for hikes in utility fees to a meeting of Cabinet ministers concerned. However, ministers concerned have typically rubber-stamped such applications. The TEPCO application, therefore, will be the first time for the ministers concerned to strictly examine whether the planned rate hike is appropriate.

TEPCO is expected to file an application with the government in May for a 10 percent increase in electricity charges it intends to carry out as early as July, and the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry will hold a hearing to deliberate the application.

The ministry is expected to consult with the Consumer Affairs Agency over the outcome of the deliberations. The agency together with certified public accountants and other experts will then examine whether the rate bump is appropriate.

If agreement is reached between the agency and the ministry, the two government bodies will jointly refer the application to the ministers concerned. After the ministers discuss the issue, Edano will decide whether to permit the rate increase.

Since its founding in 2009, the Consumer Affairs Agency has never exercised its authority to give advisories to other ministries and agencies, raising questions over its *raison d'etre*.

No comment

Holiday volunteers arrive in disaster zones

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120429002669.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun



Volunteers and residents plant flowers on the grounds of temporary housing in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Saturday.

FUKUSHIMA--Many volunteers visited devastated areas in the Tohoku region on Saturday, the first day of the Golden Week holiday period.

Members of Kokyo Seisaku Shiendan, a Tokyo-based nonprofit organization, visited a temporary housing area in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, to offer about 5,000 seedlings, including marigolds and petunias, which they helped about 50 people, including residents, to plant.

A member of the organization said: "There are many farmers in this area. We want them to enjoy some relief from the stress of life as evacuees by having a chance to touch soil again."

At another temporary housing area in the city, members of the Muikamachi Commerce and Industry Association's youth group in Minami-Uonuma, Niigata Prefecture, served Chinese-style rice bowls to about 250 people, using Koshihikari rice produced in the city. Minami-Uonuma is a leading production area of the noted rice brand.

Group leader Yasushi Sakurai, 40, said: "We're repaying the favor we received from people around the country when the Chuetsu Earthquake hit our prefecture [in 2004].

"Although all we can do is prepare meals, we're happy to be of even a little help in the reconstruction work."

Other kinds of volunteer activities, including debris removal and projects to help restore the farming and fishing industries, were also carried out in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures

Communities' goals re. housing areas

April 30, 2012

Tsunami-hit towns aim to move 70% of housing areas

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120430_13.html

Seventy percent of communities devastated by the tsunami in northeastern Japan last year want to move their residential districts inland or to higher ground.

The land and infrastructure ministry asked more than 200 communities in the three hardest-hit prefectures, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, how they hope to rebuild residential districts.

Seventy percent of the communities say they aim to move residential districts inland or to higher ground.

Twelve percent say they hope to raise the ground level and heighten levees in some areas flooded by the tsunami and move residential districts there.

Eighteen percent say they hope to strengthen and build levees before rebuilding homes where they used to stand.

Ministry officials say communities' goals reflect simulations of possible future tsunami. They say communities in areas that could be hit by waves higher than two meters hope to move residential districts or raise the ground level. They say those in areas that could be hit by smaller waves hope to keep residential districts where they are.

Faced with a summer without nukes

May 5, 2012

Energy conservation in spotlight as Japan faces summer without nuclear power



In this Wednesday, May 2, 2012 photo, solar panels cover the 11-hectare compound of the Ukishima Solar Power Station in Kawasaki near Tokyo. The new plant, jointly run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and Kawasaki City, generates enough electricity to fulfill the consumption of 2,100 households. (AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120505p2a00m0na016000c.html>

As the nation's last operating nuclear reactor is set to be suspended for regular inspections late on May 5, Japan is facing the prospect of its first summer without nuclear power in over 40 years.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. (HEPCO) is poised to suspend the operation of the No. 3 reactor at the utility's Tomari Nuclear Power Plant in the Hokkaido village of Tomari at around 11 p.m. on May 5. The reactor is the last one in operation among the 50 reactors remaining after the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

A number of reactors have been suspended for regular inspections following the onset of the nuclear disaster at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March last year, but there are no immediate prospects of their reactivation.

According to HEPCO, workers will insert control rods into the Tomari plant's No. 3 reactor at around 5 p.m. to decrease its power output before the reactor is halted at around 11 p.m.

Amid fears of a power crunch, the lifestyles of residents in Japan have been undergoing major changes since the nuclear crisis triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, with people becoming more conscious of the power they use.

A newly built condominium in Yokohama's Asahi Ward boasts some 600 solar panels on its rooftop, supplying electricity to some 100 homes in the complex. Each household in the five-story condominium is allocated six solar panels, and surplus power is sold to utilities.

"It's fun to see how much energy my solar panels can generate," said Takeshi Nomura, a 42-year-old company employee who moved into the condo in late April, as he pointed to a solar energy output monitoring device on the wall of his living room on May 2. Although it was rainy, the monitoring device indicated that Nomura's portion of solar panels had supplied 0.1 kilowatts of power that day.

According to Takara Leben Co., the seller of units in the condominium, most of the units, which cover 70 to 80 square meters, are priced at less than 40 million yen. In a standard household, residents can save some 60 percent in utility costs by using solar energy and all-electricity settings. Households whose occupants tend to be absent in the daytime can even expect to earn about 2,500 yen a month through the sale of more than half of their solar energy production -- an amount that could offset the domestic electricity price hike of 10 percent or so that Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is considering introducing as early as July.

Nomura recalls being inconvenienced during the rolling blackouts last year, as he was living in a district prone to power outages at the time.

"Since then, energy-conservation has become the norm for me," he said, indicating that the experience led him to purchase the solar-powered apartment.

An official with the planning and research department at Real Estate Economic Institute Co. comments: "Since the March 11, 2011 quake disaster, the question of whether condominiums are eco-friendly, such as being equipped with solar panels, has emerged as one of the key considerations for aspiring home buyers in the Tokyo metropolitan area."

Light-emitting diode (LED) lighting, which has garnered attention as an easy-to-use energy-saving innovation, still boasts popularity, and household LED ceiling lights have been one of the biggest hits over the past year.

Fluorescent tubes were the mainstream for household lights in March last year, according to one research source, with LED lighting accounting for only 2.9 percent of all sales figures. However, with a number of manufacturers making forays into the LED market following the quake disaster, the sales figures of LED lighting topped 50 percent for the first time in March this year.

Rising energy-conservation awareness is also evident in other ways. While the maximum power demand in TEPCO's service area fell an average of 19.7 percent during the government-ordered electricity usage restriction period between July and September last year compared to the same period the previous year, the maximum power demand continued to stay low even after the lifting of the restriction, falling an average of 9.7 percent in October and November compared to a year earlier. The maximum power demand was also 11.4 percent lower between April 1 and 23 this year compared to the figure recorded in 2010.

Many people are also rethinking their lifestyles. One 44-year-old company employee in Kyoto says he affixed cushioned packaging materials to his windows to improve heat insulation and made it through winter with his heater set at around 20 degrees Celsius -- even though he used to set it at around 24-25 degrees during previous winters. He now also sets his living room lighting 40 percent darker.

"I don't feel like I'm having to give up a lot. Perhaps thanks to the absence of extreme changes in temperature, I didn't catch a cold this winter," he said. This past winter he saved up to 20 percent on his monthly electricity bills compared with the previous winter -- equivalent to 20,000 to 30,000 yen when converted to a yearly figure.

A 32-year-old nursing-care worker living with his wife and child in Tokyo's Sugunami Ward made it a rule to shut down the circuit breaker every time his family went out during the rolling blackouts last year. He and his family don't watch TV any more than necessary, and set the three-tier brightness of their household lighting at "Level 2." As a result, their monthly electricity charges have dropped from the 4,000-5,000 yen range to somewhere around 2,000 yen.

"The nuclear disaster made me realize that we'd been wasting electricity. Saving energy pushed down my utility costs, and it was worth the effort," he said, with a satisfied look.

Japan's situation "quite severe"

May 8, 2012

Edano says electricity supply this summer 'quite severe'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120508p2g00m0dm131000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japanese industry minister Yukio Edano said Tuesday he wants to avoid the government issuing an order to restrict electricity usage this summer, but that the nation's current situation, now without nuclear power, is "quite severe."

His comments came a day after the government presented an estimate that the areas covered by Kansai Electric Power Co., which relied particularly heavily on nuclear power before the Fukushima nuclear crisis, will face a power shortage of 14.9 percent during peak hours in August.

Asked if he still thinks the government can avoid implementing mandatory power-saving drive, Edano said at a press conference, "I have a strong desire to avoid taking compulsory steps...but I honestly think the situation is quite severe."

Last summer, the government imposed the first electricity-saving order in 37 years for large-lot users in the service areas of Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co. to battle power supply constraints amid the crisis at Tokyo Electric's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Edano said the government will explore ways to avoid taking such compulsory steps this summer until the last minute.

Japan's last operating commercial nuclear reactor went offline Saturday for mandatory routine maintenance, leaving the nation without atomic-generated electricity for the first time in 42 years in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis 14 months ago.

As for who should take responsibility should mandatory restrictions on electricity use and rolling blackouts be implemented, Edano said that in a broad sense, the Fukushima crisis that made people lose trust in nuclear power is behind such concerns.

"I think that is a responsibility that Japan's entire nuclear power policy over the past decades should bear," he said, apparently including the policy implemented before the ruling Democratic Party of Japan's ascent to power in 2009.

Energy-saving plans for summer

May 10, 2012

Panel warns of electricity shortages, power-saving requirements

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120510p2g00m0dm116000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A government panel of experts said Thursday that areas covered by three utilities, including such major cities as Osaka, Fukuoka and Sapporo, are expected to face electricity shortages this summer if all of Japan's nuclear reactors remain idled and summer temperatures reach 2010 levels.

Electricity supply and demand is expected to be especially tight in Kansai Electric Power Co.'s service area in western Japan, with the maximum demand there estimated to exceed the utility's supply capacity by 15.7 percent in August, the panel said in a draft summary report.

The government is expected to compile energy-saving plans for the coming summer as early as next week, by setting power-saving targets mainly for the regions covered by the three utilities including Kyushu Electric Power Co. and Hokkaido Electric Power Co.

For Kansai Electric's service area, the government will likely consider whether to issue an order to restrict the use of electricity by companies.

The government presented to the panel's fifth meeting Thursday an estimate that if two offline reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture resume operation, the utility's power shortage rate will narrow to 0.9 percent, backing its claim that restarting them is necessary.

The panel also estimated that areas covered by Kyushu Electric and Hokkaido Electric will face power shortages of 3.7 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively.

As a result, supply of electricity by nine of Japan's 10 utilities is likely to fall short of maximum demand by 0.3 percent.

Given the severe electricity supply conditions after the Fukushima nuclear crisis, the panel said people's further power-saving efforts as well as new systems to effectively cut the use of electricity, such as the introduction of a price menu that set higher electricity rates for peak hours, would be necessary.

The panel plans to finalize its summary report Saturday.

Amid heightened public concern over nuclear safety after the nuclear accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi power plant, no Japanese reactors that were halted for scheduled checkups have been restarted.

Japan's last operating commercial nuclear reactor at Hokkaido Electric's Tomari plant went offline on May 5 for mandatory routine maintenance, leaving the nation without atomic-generated electricity for the first time in 42 years.

The government is trying to restart the Oi plant's Nos. 3 and 4 reactors to cope with an expected rise in electricity use this summer. But its efforts to regain public support for restarting the Oi reactors appear to have made little headway in the wake of the world's worst nuclear crisis in 25 years.

Last year, power supply constraints in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis resulted in rolling blackouts and led the government's to issue its first electricity-saving order in 37 years in eastern Japan.

Just don't touch the ground, kids

May 11, 2012

All Fukushima municipal primary schools to hold outdoor sports festivals

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120511p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- All 51 municipal elementary schools in the city of Fukushima will hold their sports festivals outside this year, starting from Saturday, after two-thirds held them indoors or canceled them last year in the wake of the nuclear crisis triggered by the March earthquake and tsunami, the city's education board said Thursday.

Each school decided to hold the annual event outside **after the amount of radiation at school grounds was reduced due to decontamination efforts, according to the education board.**

Last year, only 18 of the schools held their sports events outdoors, while 11 canceled them and 22 held them indoors due to radiation fears after the nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi plant set off by the quake and tsunami on March 11 last year.

Some of the schools will take measures to avoid possible radiation contamination to the students by shortening the time schedule for the meet or canceling games that could force children to touch the ground, such as tug of war, the education board said.

Japanese schools typically hold sports festivals in spring or fall outdoors. But many schools in the city of Fukushima postponed the event to the fall last year and all of the festivals in spring were held in indoor facilities.

Summer "savings"

May 12, 2012

Power-saving to be requested for wide areas of Japan this summer

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120512p2g00m0dm095000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government is considering asking companies and households in wide areas of central and western Japan to cut electricity use by around 5 percent of the maximum demand recorded during the very hot summer of 2010, sources close to the issue said Saturday.

The government may include such a policy in its energy-saving plans for the upcoming summer to be compiled in mid-May, even though the utilities serving those areas are expected to have enough capacity to meet demand.

The government apparently aims for the utilities -- Chubu Electric Power Co., Hokuriku Electric Power Co., Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co. -- to provide electricity to Kansai Electric Power Co., which is expected to be unable to meet demand in its service area, according to the sources.

A government panel on the electricity supply and demand situation this summer said Saturday that Kansai Electric's generation capacity is expected to be 14.9 percent below projected peak demand in August if two reactors at its Oi nuclear power complex in Fukui Prefecture remain offline.

The shortage rate will be even larger in July, according to the panel.

While the government plans to request a cut of around 20 percent from 2010 levels in electricity usage in the Kansai area, many of the panel's members think the supply of electricity by other utilities will likely enable it not to order mandatory power conservation measures, the sources said.

In eastern Japan, the government will set a reduction target of about 10 percent in the service area of Hokkaido Electric Power Co. But in the areas served by Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Tokyo Electric Power Co., which are recovering from the March 2011 natural and nuclear disasters, it will not set numerical power saving targets.

Fishermen and radiation

May 12, 2012

Fishermen in disaster-stricken areas say life now far tougher than last year

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120512p2a00m0na015000c.html>

ISHINOMAKI, Miyagi -- Following the April 1 introduction of new safety standards that limit allowable radioactive cesium in food to less than 100 becquerels per kilogram, fishermen in many disaster-stricken areas are saying life is worse now than it was last year.

"The tsunami last March was horrible, but life now is two, three times more difficult," uttered 59-year-old Kenichi Suda, a fisherman from Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, as he stood amid piles of rubble still remaining along the coast of the city over a year after the March 11, 2011, disasters. "If only there were no radiation problem," he said.

If the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant had never taken place, Suda, who is based some 100 kilometers from the damaged plant, would have been busy right now fishing for sand lance, whose peak season is in spring.

However, despite the fact that radiation screenings on the fish conducted this January showed doses below 100 becquerels per kilogram, Suda and other local fishermen belonging to a Miyagi prefectural fishery cooperative reached the decision to refrain from fishing this spring due to fears of radioactive contamination.

Suda, whose house was completely destroyed in last year's tsunami, managed to restart his fishing business despite the enormous damage to local ports and fishing grounds following the disasters. This, he says, has made the pain from the latest voluntary ban on fishing even worse.

"I wonder how long this (voluntary ban) will continue," he said. "We may eventually have to stop fishing for other kinds of fish as well ..."

To make ends meet, Suda is currently working part-time dividing wakame seaweed leaves, and doing other temporary jobs.

"I want to continue fishing here," he says. "The only thing we can do right now is keep working without thinking too much."

In step with the government's new food safety standards that lowered the maximum allowable dose of radiation per kilogram of food from 500 becquerels to 100 becquerels, the Miyagi Prefectural Government in March increased the number of marine food samples subject to testing from last year's 20 per week to 100 per week.

As a result, radioactive doses far exceeding the new limit were detected in four kinds of local fish, including sea bass, with the highest detected radiation dose of 360 becquerels per kilogram, and flounder, which had a maximum detected radiation dose of 400 becquerels per kilogram. The results led the Miyagi Prefectural Government and prefectural fishery cooperatives to institute a self-imposed ban on the fishing of all four kinds of fish this season at specified fishing grounds.

Meanwhile, local fish markets within Miyagi Prefecture have taken various steps to prevent fish contaminated with radiation levels higher than permitted from spreading through the market, including increasing available dosimeters and expanding radiation screenings on local marine products.

A fish market official says that despite efforts to assure product safety, however, many consumers, particularly in western Japan, are still shying away from fish from Miyagi Prefecture.

"The only thing we can do is to inform our customers that we are addressing the matter conscientiously through various ways, including radiation screenings," says Kunio Suno, the president of Ishinomaki Fish Market.

Labor needed to clear rubble

May 12, 2012

Fukushima residents struggle with quake rubble, lack of volunteers



Volunteers scrape mud and rubble out of a gutter in the Odaka district of Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120512p2a00m0na010000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- Evacuees who are now allowed to return home in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma are finding themselves with a shortage of volunteers to help them clear rubble. Many other cities in the Tohoku region that were hard hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami have had over a year to deal with such problems.

With the exception of some parts of the city, the no-go designation on Minamisoma, a city greatly affected by the quake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, was lifted over a year after the disasters on April 16, allowing residents to enter the city freely.

Kazui Nagayama, 79, commutes everyday from his temporary housing facility to his home in the city's Odaka district, which was engulfed by tsunami in March 2011. "My house is far from being cleaned up," he says. "It's exhausting, both emotionally and physically. I want people to understand that not all disaster areas are the same; those that have been affected by the nuclear crisis are different."

From Tokyo's Katsushika Ward, Misae Komatsu, 42, visited Minamisoma with her father and husband during the Golden Week holiday to volunteer for rubble removal. They helped carry furniture caked in mud out of homes and scraped mud out of gutters. "I was shocked to see that over a year after the quake and tsunami, everything was still the way it was," Komatsu said of the untouched rubble.

"I think there are people out there who don't know that there's still a need for volunteers who can help with rubble removal," suggested Toshio Watanabe, a 52-year-old volunteer from Chiba.

Currently, the Nakamachi Volunteer Center commissioned by Minamisoma's Council of Social Welfare is the only organization accepting volunteers to remove rubble in the area. The center says there were about 700 volunteers during the April 28 to May 6 "Golden Week" holiday, with one day seeing over 100 volunteers. Since May 7, however, the numbers have dropped to about a dozen per day.

Meanwhile, there is still a great demand among residents for assistance from volunteers. As of May 8, residents of Minamisoma's Odaka district have lodged with the center 14 requests for help that would require the manpower of some 420 people.

In an effort to alleviate the labor shortage, Minamisoma's Council of Social Welfare decided that volunteers would be accepted through the city's life recovery volunteer center beginning May 18.

According to the Fukushima Disaster Volunteer Center, 149,310 volunteers participated in activities in the prefecture from March 12, 2011 -- the day after the quake -- through the month of April 2012. May 2011 saw the greatest number of volunteers, at 34,385 people. The figures plummeted after September, however, with only 1,161 volunteers taking part in activities this past April.

A Fukushima Disaster Volunteer Center official points to a shift in the type of volunteer activities across the prefecture, saying: "Immediately after the disasters, there was a high demand for rubble removal, but now a lot of volunteer work is focused on supporting the everyday lives of people who are now living in temporary housing facilities."

Who's to help KEPCO this summer?

May 13, 2012

Govt to ask users to conserve to help KEPCO

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120512003013.htm>

Govt's planned request for power usage cuts this summer

	Power supply surplus/shortage	Expected consumption cuts
Hokkaido Electric Power Co.	-1.9%	7 ~ 8%
Tohoku Electric Power Co.	3.8%	No numerical targets
Tokyo Electric Power Co.	4.5%	
Total for 3 firms in eastern Japan	4.0%	-
Kansai Electric Power Co.	-14.9%	15 ~ 20%
Chubu Electric Power Co.	5.2%	5% ...>
Hokuriku Electric Power Co.	3.6%	5% ...>
Chugoku Electric Power Co.	4.5%	5% ...>
Shikoku Electric Power Co.	0.3%	5% ...>
Kyushu Electric Power Co.	-2.2%	12%
Total for 6 firms in western Japan	-2.8%	-

Surplus power to be provided to KEPCO service areas

Power surpluses and shortages are calculated on the assumption of a heat wave similar to that of 2010 and that large-lot users will be asked to curb their consumption during peak hours based on special contracts with utilities.

The government plans to ask households and businesses in the service areas of four electric power companies in western Japan to cut electricity consumption by 5 percent this summer to assist in supplying surplus electricity to Kansai Electric Power Co., according to government sources.

Under the plan, users in the service areas of Chubu Electric Power Co., Hokuriku Electric Power Co., Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co., which are thought to have surplus capacity, will be asked to cut their power consumption. The surplus power from these utilities will be provided to KEPCO's service area, which is expected to suffer serious power shortages this summer if nuclear power reactors are not reactivated.

By setting the voluntary target, the government hopes to avoid compulsory energy-saving measures, such as an order to limit power consumption in KEPCO's service area.

The government plans to hold a meeting of the Energy and Environment Council, headed by Motohisa Furukawa, state minister for national policy, as early as this week to make an official decision, the sources said.

It is relatively easy for electric utilities in western Japan to supply electricity to each other as they operate on the same current. **The electrical current in western Japan is different than the current in eastern Japan.**

The government will ask users in KEPCO's service area to cut power consumption by 15 percent to 20 percent from the levels in 2010, when the nation experienced an extremely hot summer.

As areas covered by Kyushu Electric Power Co. are also predicted to experience shortages, the government also plans to ask those users to cut consumption by about 12 percent.

Meanwhile, the government will ask users in areas served by Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to cut power consumption by 7 percent to 8 percent.

However, it does not plan to set any numerical targets for Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co., which are expected to have surplus power.

The government's expert panel tasked with verifying electricity supply and demand compiled a report on the outlook for this summer on Saturday.

The committee predicted a 14.9 percent supply shortage in KEPCO's service areas, which were heavily dependent on nuclear power, if the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi nuclear power plant are not reactivated, even if large-lot users are asked to reduce consumption at peak hours based on their contracts with the utility.

If the government issues compulsory orders to limit electricity consumption in the Kansai region as it did last summer for service areas of TEPCO and Tohoku Electric Power, it is expected to deal a serious blow to the region's economy and people's livelihoods.

Though the government aims to overcome the problem with voluntary power-saving efforts by users, it has decided to prepare a backup plan to compensate for uncertainties about the voluntary efforts. By asking users in the four utilities in western Japan to take power-saving steps, the government hopes to increase the amount of surplus power to be supplied to KEPCO to prevent sudden blackouts.

Power-saving Gov't plan

May 18, 2012-05-18

Gov't adopts power-saving plan for summer

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120518p2g00m0dm050000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government on Friday finalized a power-saving plan this summer, asking households and businesses served by seven utilities to cut consumption by 5 to 15 percent to deal with an expected shortage in the aftermath of last year's Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The government refrained from issuing a compulsory electricity-saving order, but prepares for possible rolling blackouts in areas covered by four utilities, including Kansai Electric Power Co.

Under the plan, users in the service area of Kansai Electric in western Japan, including Osaka and Kyoto, will be asked to cut electricity consumption by 15 percent from the levels in 2010, when Japan had its hottest summer since in 1898.

The move follows a report from a government panel on Saturday projecting Kansai Electric's supply capacity in August to be 14.9 percent below the peak demand in 2010 and that two other utilities will also see power shortages if none of Japan's 50 offline nuclear reactors resumes operation.

A surplus of at least 3 percent is deemed necessary to prevent unexpected blackouts.

The government is trying to reactivate two offline reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture but faces opposition from some quarters amid heightened concern over nuclear power after Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster, which unfolded in the wake of a massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Prior to the Fukushima Daiichi plant disaster, Japan relied on nuclear plants for about 30 percent of its electricity.

For the upcoming summer, the government made a 10 percent reduction target for areas served by Kyushu Electric Power Co. while setting 7 percent for areas served by Hokkaido Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co.

Even for areas covered by three other utilities -- Chubu Electric Power Co., Hokuriku Electric Power Co., and Chugoku Electric Power Co.-- where the electricity supply and demand situation is not so severe, the government will issue a 5 percent power-saving target to enable spare electricity to be transmitted to utilities with supply shortages.

The reductions will be sought for July 23 to Sept. 14 in Hokkaido Electric's service area on the country's northernmost main island, and from July 2 to Sept. 7 in the areas served by the other six utilities.

"An extremely severe electricity supply-and-demand situation is expected this summer in Hokkaido, central and western Japan, especially in Kansai Electric's service area," Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said at the meeting.

For the service area of Kansai Electric, which relies especially heavily on nuclear power, the government explored the possibility of issuing a compulsory order to limit companies' electricity consumption. Such a step was taken last summer for the first time in 37 years in the service areas of Tokyo Electric and Tohoku Electric in the wake of the March 2011 disaster.

But the government decided against repeating the measure this summer in the face of calls from businesses in western Japan to avoid dealing a blow to their production and the region's economy.

While the government hopes to overcome the power supply constraints with voluntary power-saving efforts by users, the government will also prepare for possible rolling blackouts to deal with unexpected contingencies, such as breakdowns at thermal power plants.

The backup plan applies to the service areas of four utilities -- Kansai Electric, Kyushu Electric, Hokkaido Electric and Shikoku Electric.

Govt. sets summer power-saving targets

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120518_18.html

The Japanese government has decided to ask residents and businesses to save power this summer if all the country's nuclear reactors are kept offline.

The Cabinet on Friday approved voluntary power-saving targets for areas serviced by 7 utilities. The reduction targets are based on demand in 2010, when Japan had an unusually hot summer.

The most serious shortfall is expected in areas supplied by Kansai Electric Power, including Osaka and Kyoto. They will be asked to reduce their usage by 15 percent or more.

Kyushu Electric's customers will be asked to reduce their usage by at least 10 percent.

Consumers serviced by Chubu, Chugoku and Hokuriku power companies will be urged to save at least 5 percent so that electricity can be diverted to Kansai and Kyushu.

Shikoku and Hokkaido electric power companies will have a reduction target of at least 7 percent.

The government says it will review the targets, especially for areas in western Japan, if the reactors at Kansai power's Ohi plant are restarted. Municipalities near the plant are debating a government proposal to resume its operations.

All 50 of Japan's nuclear reactors are now offline for regular inspections.

Chinese tours to start again

May 18, 2012

China mainland tour group to head for Fukushima, 1st since disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120518p2g00m0dm045000c.html>

SHANGHAI (Kyodo) -- The first tourist group to visit Japan's Fukushima Prefecture from China's mainland since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster will leave Shanghai on Sunday, its organizer said.

The group will visit the prefecture's Iwaki city and Aizu region suffering from negative rumors stemming from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear crisis triggered by the disaster to support their recovery, said Wang Zhenghua, chairman of the budget carrier Spring Airlines which has planned the visit.

According to the prefecture's Shanghai office, group tours from Hong Kong and Taiwan have resumed, but those from the Chinese mainland have yet to do so.

Wang will personally lead the tour group, which is also intended to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic normalization between China and Japan. There are about 40 participants -- half are members of the public and the rest are from China's tourism industry.

Prefectural officials are hopeful that the group's visit will help reduce the negative rumors and resume Fukushima-bound tours from China.

Spring Airlines conducted a preliminary study in the prefecture and judged there are no nuclear contamination issues, Wang said.

The group will arrive in Ibaraki airport from Shanghai Pudong International Airport on Sunday before heading by bus to Spa Resort Hawaiians, a leisure complex in Iwaki.

After attending a welcome ceremony by prefectural parties, the group will see the Hula Girls' stage the resort is known for.

Starting Monday, the group will visit scenic sites including the Goshiki pond and Inawashiro lake in the Urabandai area and Tsuruga castle in Aizuwakamatsu city before returning to Shanghai on Thursday.

If group tours from China to Fukushima resume on a full scale, it would be a gift to Japan, Wang said, expressing his enthusiasm for expanding tours to the prefecture.

Time to lift Korean travel alert?

May 17, 2012

Fukushima gov. asks ROK to lift travel alert

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120516005465.htm>

SEOUL (Jiji Press)--Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato asked South Korea on Wednesday to remove its travel warning to the prefecture that was imposed after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Sato made the request at a meeting with South Korean First Vice Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Ahn Ho Young in Seoul.

Ahn replied that his nation will work hard to respond to the request.

South Korea restricts its citizens from traveling to areas near Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was crippled by the March disaster. An alert remains in place for the rest of the prefecture.

During a visit to the headquarters of Asiana Airlines on Tuesday, Sato asked the company to reopen flight services between Fukushima and Incheon Airport in Seoul. But the airline said Seoul's travel alert needs to be lifted before it can resume these services.

At Wednesday's meeting, Sato also handed Ahn a letter addressed to South Korean President Lee Myung Bak that thanks the leader for visiting disaster areas in the prefecture.

Unattainable targets?

May 20, 2012

KEPCO power targets wishful thinking?

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120519003200.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Following the government's announcement of its power-saving plans for households this summer, it remains to be seen whether such measures will be effective, as **their success depends entirely on the efforts of individual households.**

Considering that households in Kansai Electric Power Co.'s service area failed to reduce power consumption as much as expected last year, it is uncertain whether power consumption in the area can be reduced by 15 percent, as requested by the government. The target may turn out to be wishful thinking.

Peak hours for household power consumption are between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m., with air-conditioners accounting for 60 percent of the power used. If individual households set air-conditioner temperatures 2 C higher, at 28 C, this would save 10 percent in power consumption.

The proposed power-saving measures are "basically the same as last year's," a senior official at the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry said.

Some observers are doubtful about the effectiveness of the measures in KEPCO's service area.

Last summer, KEPCO called on people to reduce energy use by 15 percent. However, household power consumption declined only 4 percent when comparing the data with figures for days with similar temperatures and conditions.

Last winter, KEPCO asked households in its service area to cut power use by 10 percent, but the reduction rate was only 4 percent. "We don't expect 5 percent or more in power savings for the Kansai region," one observer said.

The government established a system to transfer surplus power from four power companies--Chubu, Hokuriku, Chugoku and Shikoku electric power companies--to KEPCO and Kyushu Electric Power Co. to avoid large-scale blackouts in Kansai and other regions.

A government official said, "It's a mutual cooperation system for power companies in western Japan to jointly overcome a difficult situation."

However, unless people in KEPCO's service area proactively make efforts to minimize power consumption, the system will force people in the service areas of other utilities to shoulder an extra burden, thereby undermining the system, observers argue.

Another government official expressed a harsh view of the situation.

"Local government heads in KEPCO's service area should seek cooperation from Chubu and other companies, with their heads bowed. **We cannot get through this difficult situation unless we all work together,**" the official said.

Going round in circles

May 20, 2012

Western Japan puzzled over power reductions / Affected businesses concerned over possible electricity shortages hurting production numbers

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120519003008.htm>

Jun Onoda and Hiromi Uechi / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

The government plans to overcome possible electricity shortages this summer with the cooperation of businesses and residents in western Japan, but people in the region are likely to be dissatisfied with the measures.

The government on Friday officially announced power-saving measures for the summer, which will be in effect from July 2.

To minimize electricity consumption cuts in Kansai Electric Power Co.'s service area, where a serious power shortage is predicted, those in the service areas of Chubu Electric Power Co. and three other utilities in surrounding areas will be asked to reduce power consumption to provide surplus electricity to KEPCO.

But residents in areas included in the government plan and companies that transferred operations to western Japan last year expecting sufficient power supply in the region may face difficulties over the cuts.

Makoto Yagi, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan who is also KEPCO's president, said at a press conference on Friday, "It's extremely regrettable that we have to ask other areas to reduce consumption ."

Yagi apologized because the measures will affect service areas of other utilities, possibly causing power shortages.

Some companies are reviewing production plans or improving facilities in preparation for a possible power shortage although such measures are costly.

Toyota Motor Corp. will bring in eight in-house natural gas power generators and install cogeneration systems in 12 plants in Aichi Prefecture.

This will raise the percentage of the company's in-house power generation from about 20 percent currently to about 30 percent.

Toyota set this year's domestic production goal at 3.4 million units, up 23 percent from last year.

If production is hampered by power shortages, Toyota will face a disadvantage against its U.S. and South Korean rivals in the global market. This possibility prompted Toyota to invest in the backup systems.

But President Yoshiomi Yamada of Central Japan Railway Co. (JR Tokai) said: "Why was Chubu Electric chosen to provide power? I also don't understand how the decision was made."

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Businesses rethinking plans

A number of companies that considered moving production to western Japan amid concerns of possible power shortages due to the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake are now reconsidering, following the announcement of electricity reduction targets of 15 percent in KEPCO's service area.

Although a power shortage is predicted for KEPCO's service area--and others this summer--KEPCO could possibly avoid a power shortage if KEPCO's Oi nuclear power plant is restarted.

Businesses are apparently perplexed with the government's indecisiveness over restarting the facility.

"We are really confused [over conservation measures] as [we have no idea] whether the Oi plant will be restarted," said Akihiro Nikkaku, president of Toray Industries, Inc.

Some companies have already reviewed their production plans. Lion Corp. is going to move part of its detergent production from a factory in Sakai, Osaka Prefecture, in KEPCO's service area, to a factory in Ichihara, Chiba Prefecture, which is in Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s service area. The move is necessary as the factory uses huge amounts of power to dry materials. Although these production shifts may allow companies to hedge against power shortages, they may be hit with increased costs as TEPCO raised electricity charges for large-lot users.

Meanwhile, Dai-ichi Life Insurance Co., which moved part of its call center from Tokyo to Osaka in 2011, is not considering a similar move this year.

"We will meet the 15 percent power reduction target by decreasing lighting and setting air conditioners at a higher temperature," a company spokesperson said.

Fujitsu Ltd. is still considering what to do this year after it relocated part of its data center from the Tokyo metropolitan area to Hyogo Prefecture in 2011.

Mitsubishi Motors Corp. is considering shifting some of its daytime production to evenings at its two factories in Kyoto and Shiga prefectures while maintaining production numbers.

The government was slow in compiling its power reduction plan, announcing it on Friday.

"As few politicians have experience in business, they don't understand our **sense of crisis and urgency**," said Yasuchika Hasegawa, chairman of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives and president of Takeda Pharmaceutical Co.

Opinion on compensation

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/chuo/dy/opinion/20120521.htm>

Compensation for Damage from Nuclear Power and Restoration

Jun Masuda

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Area of Specialization: Civil Law

Read in Japanese

1. *Damage Compensation Issues*

There are various kinds of disputes in society, many of which are civil disputes on damage compensation. I am a lawyer and teach at a university after serving as a judge. I have been interested in damage compensation issues since I became a judge. In my experience dealing with actual civil disputes including lawsuits, there are not a few cases where the amount of damage compensation is difficult to calculate or is determined too low as compared with the conventional wisdom of the day. Some areas do not have a clear criterion or calculation method for the amount of damage compensation. It is, furthermore, often obscure what items in a compensation claim would be accepted, and to what extent.

I chose the issue of damage compensation as one of my fields of study, and I have studied and published articles and books on judicial precedents such as solatiums for defamation and those for infringements of privacy. It seems that they have been found useful in the litigation settings.

Later on, in modern society, damage from damaging rumors has become more common, where product trade is terminated or reduced due to information provided to consumers, business partners, or society that would cause suspicion of a product defect for various reasons even without any actual defect or fault in the product itself. So, I became interested in damaging rumors and began to study judicial precedents regarding damaging rumors and economic damage including damage from nuclear power, and published the results as articles and books (e.g. *Legal Theories and Practice on Damaging rumors and Economic Damage [Fuhyo Songai / Keizaiteki Songai no Hori to Jitsumu]*). As for damage from nuclear power, when the JCO criticality accident occurred in September 1999, I served as a member of the Nuclear Power Damage Investigation Board, and was studying judicial precedents regarding damage from nuclear power.

2. *The Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster and the nuclear power plant accident*

After I thought personally that I had studied damage compensation issues enough and moved to other areas, especially judicial precedents regarding commercial transactions, the 9.0-magnitude Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster struck suddenly on March 11, 2011.

Because I have been engaged in legislation as a member responsible for civil law at the Ministry of Justice immediately after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Disaster (during this activity, we used cases of the Great Kanto Earthquake Disaster as references), I had a great interest in the damage, and was paying close attention to responses by the nuclear power plants in the afflicted areas as well as damage from tsunamis. As of March 11, I felt relieved hearing a report that the operation was successfully stopped at Fukushima

Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. From the next day, however, I experienced anxious days that were an absolute nightmare, just as you readers did.

As grave circumstances arose one after another, including hydrogen explosions and the massive release of radioactive substances, I hurried to review the content of the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damage (Nuclear Compensation Act), and publish articles in journals regarding the issues of compensation-related disputes that were expected to arise in large volume. When a great disaster breaks out, it is crucial to steadily carry out rapid and appropriate responses such as rapid lifesaving, lifeline recovery, maintaining a livelihood for the time being, life support, and recovery of business. Things to be done two steps after them include predicting civil legal issues, presenting resolution frameworks, and offering a large amount of consultation services. When it comes to a large disaster, it is vital to provide rescues, recovery, and restoration rapidly, appropriately and efficiently. In the case of the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster, unfortunately, political, administrative, and other various problems have been revealed, and smooth recovery and restoration have actually been impeded. As I was requested by various people to present my opinions, I compiled them into a book entitled *Lawsuit Practice for Nuclear Power Plant Accidents [Genpatsu Jiko no Sosho Jitsumu]*, and published it with the hope that it would help predict and prevent future disputes.

3. Damage compensation and recovery / restoration

For the issues of compensation for this nuclear power plant accident, the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation published interim guidelines and presented a standard for resolution, in order to facilitate dispute resolution through reconciliation with Tokyo Electric Power Company and mediation by the Center for Dispute Reconciliation for Nuclear Damage Compensation. The interim guidelines allow a wider scope of damage compensation than those based on the standards and ideas of judicial precedents for damage compensation in lawsuits. The reconciliation proposed by the Center for Dispute Reconciliation further extends this scope and amounts to allow compensation for damaging rumors and business losses beyond the existing criteria set by judicial precedents. The current damage compensation issues are characterized by the facts that the cause is one of the biggest incidents in Japanese history and that the interim guidelines and other measures allow very extensive compensation for damage from damaging rumors.

On the other hand, however, the amount of compensation for this nuclear accident is too huge to predict, and it is expected that this amount will ultimately be passed on to electricity charges and taxes. It is time for the society as a whole to realistically consider how to deal with the future burden. In addition, if a nuclear operator is not exempted—it is granted exemption when an accident is caused by an exceptionally enormous natural disaster—then the Nuclear Compensation Act provides that only the nuclear operator shall be liable for the entire damage from nuclear power, which is called *channeling of liability*. As a result, issues regarding amendments to the law have emerged, such as whether the law should limit the burden on nuclear operators, and on how this pertains to the obligations of the national government. Moreover, actual cases of compensation claims seem to encounter problems including excessive claims, false claims, expanded compensation criteria, and delayed resolution due to expectations of future criteria expansion. It is also anticipated that many cases will not be resolved through reconciliation.

Compensation money—which is supposed to be used for the restoration and recovery of life and business of each afflicted company and individual—might not be used according to its original purpose. Failing to deal with the restoration and recovery of life and business at an early stage would cause people to face a miserable situation in which they would have to depend on damage compensation.

Even if most of the disputes over compensation for damage from this nuclear power plant accident were resolved through reconciliation, it is expected that a great many cases would still litigated. **We may have to spend several decades to resolve all of the disputes and lawsuits.** I am going to do my best and keep paying attention to this issue. I hope all of the disputes on damage compensation are resolved as soon as possible.

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How many will be able to return home?

June 12, 2012

Prolonged evacuation around nuclear plant

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120611003846.htm>

FUKUSHIMA (Jiji Press)--**Over 30 percent of people who lived near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are unlikely to be able to return home even five years after the March 2011 disaster,** the government has said.

The government said 32 percent of about 86,000 evacuees from 11 municipalities near the nuclear plant are expected to remain on evacuation order five years after the outbreak of the crisis.

The proportion is projected at 18 percent in 10 years, the government said in a meeting with local officials Saturday.

In the town of Okuma, where part of the nuclear plant is located, only 3 percent of evacuees are expected to be able to return home in five years. The proportion is likely to rise to 18 percent in 10 years.

The estimates are based on the assumption that no decontamination work will be carried out, according to the government.

Annual radiation levels are expected to stay above 20 millisieverts even five years from now in some areas of six of the 11 municipalities, the government said.

In retrospect

June 12, 2012

Panel raps Prime Minister's Office over nuclear crisis

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120611004550.htm>

Excessive intervention by the Prime Minister's Office impeded efforts to contain the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, a Diet-appointed panel has concluded.

The Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission finalized the main points of its investigation results Saturday, ahead of its final report.

The commission also concluded that the delay in reacting to the crisis by the Prime Minister's Office caused serious confusion in the evacuation of local residents.

The panel will likely conclude, in its final report to be submitted to heads of both chambers of the Diet at the end of June, that the Prime Minister's Office was most responsible for confusion in the response to the nuclear crisis, sources said.

In Saturday's meeting, panelmember Shuya Nomura, a professor at Chuo University's law school, detailed the final report's six main points, which were approved without objection.

The first point is **the Prime Minister's Office's excessive intervention in the response to the nuclear crisis.**

Nomura was harshly critical, saying: "Officials at the Prime Minister's Office made frequent calls to workers on site to ask inappropriate basic questions. To answer such questions, the workers had to waste their time and energy.

"The Prime Minister's Office's frequent intervention confused the chain of command [at the plant]." The comment apparently referred to such actions as then Prime Minister Naoto Kan calling then plant chief Masao Yoshida.

Regarding concern that TEPCO hinted it would withdraw all workers from the crippled plant, Nomura said the panel could not find any evidence to show the firm had made such a decision.

Although it has been said that one of the few "achievements" of the Prime Minister's Office through its intervention was to block the full withdrawal of workers, the premise of this claim has now been refuted, observers say.

Nomura also said TEPCO's headquarters "did not coordinate with the Prime Minister's Office's intervention, but simply conveyed instructions [from the office] to workers on site."

The panel's second point is that the crisis-control system and other relevant functions of the Prime Minister's Office must be drastically reconstructed.

Concerning initial responses of the Prime Minister's Office, Nomura said, "**It failed to play the role it should have, leading to delays in issuing evacuation instructions and releasing information on the nuclear crisis.**"

The statement is based on the fact Kan declared a nuclear emergency more than one hour after TEPCO informed the government of the plant's critical situation, which caused a delay in issuing evacuation instructions to residents in the affected areas.

Given the Prime Minister's Office's excessive intervention, the panel suggested in the third point that **in principle, during a serious accident, matters inside a nuclear power plant should be handled by the utility, while outside issues should be covered by the government.**

The panel also pointed out difficulties in using the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information, or SPEEDI, a system that predicts the spread of radioactive substances, to issue evacuation instructions at the outset of the crisis.

In terms of the overall administration of nuclear security, the panel said the government apparently undermined the safety and health of local residents.

Depressed Fukushima mothers

June 19, 2012

15 percent of Fukushima's nursing mothers report signs of depression: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120619p2a00m0na011000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- About 15 percent of women living in Fukushima Prefecture who gave birth after the meltdowns at the nuclear plant here have depressive tendencies, according to a recent prefectural survey.

The questionnaire, part of a Fukushima Prefectural Government resident health survey, was distributed to 15,954 expectant and nursing mothers in January this year. By late March, authorities obtained a total of 8,886 valid responses, or approximately a 55.7 percent response rate.

Their answer to questions, such as "Have you felt sad or depressed within a one month period?" suggested that 1,298 respondents, or 14.6 percent, have depression tendencies and need medical treatment or other forms of support.

In a free comment section, many respondents expressed anxiety over the nuclear crisis. Thirty-six percent of respondents answered that they wish radiation screenings and tests were conducted, and dosimeters distributed; 25 percent answered that they are concerned about radiation effects on their children's health, and 17 percent reported concerns over breastfeeding and using powdered milk, among other comments.

The prefectural government has arranged a telephone support system with nurses and other specialists at the Fukushima Medical University for women who reported signs of depression in the survey.

Prefectural officials have expressed their wish to continue the support system and a more detailed analysis of the survey in the future.

Not so much rubble after all?

June 20, 2012

Aichi to cancel plan to build facilities to incinerate quake rubble

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120620p2a00m0na004000c.html>

NAGOYA -- Aichi Gov. Hideaki Omura said the prefectural government has decided to cancel its plan to build three facilities to incinerate rubble generated by the March 11, 2011 disasters because such waste will likely decrease substantially.

"Flammable waste will decrease considerably and the necessity of such facilities would likely diminish by the time they are to begin operations," Omura told a regular session of the prefectural assembly on June 20. He made the remark in response to a question by Takashige Sugiura, a Liberal Democratic Party member of the assembly.

In April, the governor announced that the Aichi Prefectural Government will build rubble incinerators and final disposal sites for non-flammable rubble in the prefecture cities of Chita, Hekinan and Tahara. He allocated 600 million yen to finance a feasibility study of the project at his own discretion.

However, the Environment Ministry has revised downward its estimation of flammable rubble that needs to be incinerated outside the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate and Miyagi from 2.55 million metric tons to 1.05 million tons.

Since Tokyo and other local bodies have already begun accepting flammable rubble from disaster-hit areas, Gov. Omura has deemed that the Aichi Prefectural Government does not need to spend much time and money to build new incinerators.

However, the prefectural government will go ahead with the construction of final disposal sites and accept non-flammable disaster rubble as planned. It will announce the details of its plan to accept non-flammable rubble sometime around August.

The prefectural government has submitted a supplementary budget draft, which includes 69.5 million yen for test incineration in preparation to accept rubble from disaster areas, to the assembly.

During the session, Sugiura questioned the significance of going ahead with the planned test incineration despite the prefectural government's decision to cancel the incinerator construction plan.

The governor justified the test incineration. "The incineration test is aimed at reassuring prefectural residents that disaster rubble is safe."

Expect rolling blackouts this summer

June 24, 2012

4 utility firms devise plans for rolling blackouts

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120623003156.htm>

Jiji Press

Kansai Electric Power Co. and three other power companies have said they will implement rolling blackouts in their service areas this summer when power supply capacity is expected to exceed peak demand by less than 1 percent.

Such blackouts, designed to avoid sudden, massive outages, would last about two hours, according to the companies, which also include **Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co.**

The power utilities will issue warnings first, and then take the action unless electricity consumption in their services areas shows signs of dropping below 99 percent of capacity.

Kansai Electric, which is expected to face the tightest power supply-demand situation in the nation, will proceed with rolling blackouts, if necessary, on weekdays from July 2 to Sept. 7 by dividing its service area into 48 groups.

Its clients would basically have no power once a day, though the possibility cannot be ruled out there would be two rounds of blackouts, Kansai Electric said.

Masao Ikoma, executive vice president of Kansai Electric, told a press conference that the company will make all-out efforts to maintain a stable supply of electricity in its service area in Osaka and surrounding prefectures.

Meanwhile, Kyushu Electric and Shikoku Electric said if rolling blackouts become unavoidable, they will come from July 2 to Sept 7. Hokkaido Electric said it may stop power supplies sometime from July 23 to Sept. 14.

Based on the policy of the central government, **the four companies will continue transmitting electricity to medical institutions, police stations and fire department facilities. They will also try to do so as far as they can for public transportation systems.**

In the wake of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami last year, Tokyo Electric Power Co. conducted rolling blackouts for 10 days in its service area mainly in eastern Japan, because many of its power stations went offline. The move created turmoil in the area including Tokyo, such as train service halts, and even caused fatal accidents at intersections with nonfunctioning traffic lights.

Ruiko Muto's despair

June 18, 2012

A stolen life: Fukushima woman looks back on lost peaceful life due to nuclear crisis



Ruiko Muto poses for a photograph together with her dog near her coffee shop, Kirara, in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2012/06/18/20120618p2a00m0na019000c/002.html>

TAMURA, Fukushima -- For some 16 years prior to the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, 58-year-old Ruiko Muto led a simple, peaceful life surrounded by this rural city's beautiful, rich nature. Today, 15 months after the disaster, she has lost much of what used to fulfill her life, leaving a growing sentiment of resentment and despair.

It was the sounds of nature that used to remind Muto of the changing seasons. Summers came along with bird cries and appearances of the migrating paradise flycatchers. New green leaves grew vigorously, with their growth suddenly stopping right before the approaching autumn. In winter, the 58-year-old relaxed at her woodstove-heated home. In spring, she enjoyed the bloom of violets, winter speedwells, plantain lilies, and many other flowers and plants.

Amid such rich nature stood Muto's mountain-forest coffee shop, Kirara.

Kirara, bearing the meaning of "brilliance," was built in 2003 after Muto's retirement from a prefectural school for disabled children, shortly before turning 50. The naming represented her wish to spend the latter part of her life "shining." At Kirara, where many people who sympathized with her way of life gathered, Muto served various specialties made of local plants and forest treats, including a popular acorn curry dish. Muto's cuisine also featured miso soup with local plants such as ashitaba.

"Every season had its own beauty as if it were a painting. Living amid such beautiful nature in my hometown used to make me happy," says Muto.

However, in March 2011 Muto's life changed drastically. The tsunami-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was located only about 45 kilometers from her coffee shop. The hydrogen explosion at the plant dispersed radioactive materials as far as the mountains near Muto's shop. Suddenly she was no longer able to eat nuts, berries, fruit, or wild plants, from the local forests, nor could she use wood to heat up her house or cook. The critical situation forced her to close her coffee shop.

"All living things in the forests were showered with radioactive substances. My life in the mountains will never be restored," says Muto quietly, though anger sparks in her eyes.

As a result of the nuclear disaster, countless numbers of Fukushima residents were forced to lead insecure lives, characterized by various restrictions and constant worry over radiation. The prefecture, which often used to be called "beautiful island" had been greatly hurt. As of May 10 this year, some 62,038 residents have evacuated to other prefectures. A ban on rice planting has been imposed on a total area of some 7,300 hectares of rice paddies.

"It makes me uneasy," uttered Muto with a sigh at the thought of the unclear road ahead of her.

Muto had chosen this isolated life in the mountains and forests in opposition to the existence of nuclear power plants. When the construction of the Fukushima plant began in 1967, Muto recalls she was "indifferent" (toward nuclear power.) However, oddly enough, in the same year when the Chernobyl disaster struck Ukraine in 1986, Muto's elder sister, who had been suffering from a thyroid gland disease since she was a student at Fukushima University, developed leukemia at the age of 36.

"When we were growing up, nuclear experiments were conducted in the U.S., the Soviet Union and China. I remembered I was told not to let myself be exposed to rain," Muto recalls. Contrary to people's anxieties, however, nuclear plants continued to be built in Japan one after another. While Muto took part in an anti-nuclear power campaign, she came to the decision that it is necessary to change one's own lifestyle first, before opposing such developments.

This decision led her to begin a new life in the countryside, surrounded by nature, at the age of 42. It took her three years to level the land and build a cottage. "With only lamps and woodstoves, when you looked up the sky you could see all the stars," Muto recalls.

In her life in the countryside Muto aimed to achieve nearly complete self-sufficiency. She expanded her agricultural field and set-up solar panels, as well as cooking and water-heating devices that used solar heat. She used her retirement allowance to build her house and open Kirara.

On March 11, 2011, the day the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the Tohoku region, Muto was at her coffee shop. She heard the mountains rumbling and the tremors gradually became stronger. The first thought on her mind was whether the nuclear power plant was safe, she recalls.

As she was cleaning her almost undamaged shop after the earthquake, she heard the news that there had been a complete power loss at the plant's reactors. Amid a snowstorm, she got in her car together with her elderly mother and other people, and headed west.

"I made the decision (to live in the countryside) exactly in order to avoid such a thing ..." Muto thought with irritation at the time.

The following day, March 12, Muto quickly left Aizuwakamatsu in Fukushima Prefecture where she had briefly taken shelter, and headed home to call on other people to evacuate as well. As soon as she arrived back home, the news of the hydrogen explosion at the plant awaited her. She then evacuated to Yamagata Prefecture.

In mid-April, pushed by her mother who wanted to go back to Tamura, Muto once again returned to her coffee shop. The forests and the agriculture fields seemed unchanged at a glance. However, radiation doses in the vicinity at the time were 1 to 3 microsieverts per hour. Muto could no longer return to her pre-disaster life.

"Kirara used to be the place I lived," Muto says of her closed coffee shop.

At present, Muto is taking part in various gatherings in Japan and abroad that openly discuss the reality of Fukushima Prefecture, as well as group initiatives demanding plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and other related authorities take responsibility for the crisis.

However, the nuclear crisis has also led to estrangement between formerly close people. In the case of Muto, a local farmer who previously used to give her vegetables, now no longer does so. The man restarted farming last autumn after radiation doses somewhat decreased in the region, and he is already harvesting crops. However, he began keeping a distance from Muto after noticing that she no longer worked her own fields.

"The crisis has created gaps between people who have different opinions about the effects of radiation," Muto says with regret. "The government hid a lot of information and presented the crisis as a much more minor incident than it actually was. Fukushima people are divided in their opinions regarding evacuation, compensation, decontamination and other matters. We were regarded as 'obedient residents,' but we can no longer allow authorities to treat us as ignorant people," she adds as she hopes that one day she will be able to restart her countryside life.

Green tea is safe

June 25, 2012

Sayama green tea campaign

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120625_27.html

Commuters at a train station in Iruma, Saitama Prefecture, received packs of fresh green tea on Monday morning, given out by local assembly members in a campaign to show the local produce is safe from radioactivity.

Sales of the local specialty Sayama tea plunged after radioactive cesium exceeding the tentative government limit was detected, following last year's Fukushima nuclear accident.

Saitama inspectors tested all the prefecture's tea factories after this year's late-spring harvest, and found all radioactive cesium levels to be below the government limit.

Municipal assembly members in 3 other cities in Saitama Prefecture are also distributing tea this week to promote the local specialty.

All about fish

Event to promote fish caught off Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120625_28.html

An event to promote marine products caught off Fukushima Prefecture was held on Monday at the Soma fishing port.

Last Friday, fishermen from Fukushima carried out tests by fishing of 2 types of octopus and one type of shellfish. No radioactive substances were detected.

The products went on sale in Soma and Fukushima cities for the first time since last year's nuclear accident.

About 30 people, including Soma Mayor Hidekiyo Tachiya and members of the local fishing industry, attended the seafood sampling party held by the city and the local fisheries association.

They also inspected a facility created in the fishing port to test marine products for radiation.

Tachiya said his city will make efforts to let the whole nation know that marine products from Fukushima Prefecture are safe.

Participants received a platter containing 9 items, including the octopus and shellfish that went on sale recently. They tasted the bounty of the sea from Fukushima for the first time in many months.

First catch off Fukushima since disaster sold

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120625_23.html

Seafood caught off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture went on sale at local stores on Monday. The products were made available for the first time since last year's nuclear accident.

A type of shellfish and 2 kinds of octopus caught near Soma City are being sold at a local supermarket. The seafood can also be purchased in Fukushima City.

Sales were approved after the prefectural fisheries association found no unsafe levels of radiation in last Friday's test fishing catch.

Retail prices are about 70 percent of what they were before the accident. Shoppers are welcoming the return of local hauls.

One customer said the seafood was fresh and flavorful. He said he hopes the store will offer more of it.

A store clerk said he is happy to contribute to the long-awaited revival of Fukushima's fisheries. He says the seafood on offer is safe since it is tested twice for radiation; once, by the fishing cooperatives, and again, by the store.

The association says it hopes to ship the next catch to Tokyo and other large cities if customer response is positive.

Gov't against unfounded promises

June 25, 2012

Tokyo gov't warns against unfair ads over radioactive decontamination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120625p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government found 136 cases of unfair advertisements on the Internet for radioactive decontamination in fiscal 2011 in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, government officials say.

The officials say the Tokyo government ordered advertisers involved to correct or drop their ads.

The metropolitan government's Bureau of Citizens and Cultural Affairs, which monitors web banners as part of its consumer affairs operations, checked about 24,000 banner ads in fiscal 2011.

Of the total, the government issued instructions in 582 cases, up sharply from 302 a year before, citing violation of the Act against Unjustifiable Premiums and Misleading Representations and other regulations. Of the 582 cases, about one-fourth concerned ads promoting radioactive decontamination without verified data.

According to the metropolitan government, 56 cases were for ads for water purification equipment, 34 cases involved ads for health food, 16 concerned ads for radioactivity measuring devices and 11 were ads for protective masks.

Some ads for water purification devices said the equipment could remove 95 percent to 99 percent of radioactive cesium and 96 percent to 99 percent of iodine, while some promoted supplements that could supposedly remove radioactive materials and carcinogenic substances from the body.

The metropolitan government also found protective masks and detergents that were being touted as effective against radioactive substances although they had been produced like other ordinary masks and detergents. Some other products featuring zeolite, which has the property of absorbing some substances, were advertised without any scientific proof.

The Tokyo government found 39 unfair ads for disaster-prevention products, characterizing some as being recommended by U.S. international rescue teams without providing any foundation for the claims.

A metropolitan government official says the number of unfair ads remains high even over a year after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear crisis, and urges consumers to check the credibility of advertising claims.

One way to save power

June 26, 2012

Kyoto to close its buildings to save power

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120626004096.htm>

KYOTO--To save electricity, the Kyoto prefectural government has decided to close one of its three main office buildings on weekday afternoons on a rotational basis from July 23 to Aug. 2.

The move will require about 1,500 staff to take paid days off. An official said daily power consumption would be reduced by about 10 percent at all office buildings, including local branch offices.

Power consumption is expected to increase during the period due to the expected end of the rainy season and the start of summer holidays. In addition, full operation of the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant in Oi, Fukui Prefecture, is likely to be postponed until Aug. 2.

The buildings to be closed are Building No. 1, which houses the governor's office and the financial affairs section, Building No.2, which holds the medical care and livestock industry sections, and Building No.3, where the education board is based.

The prefecture had initially considered closing all buildings should KEPCO issue a warning of a possible electricity shortage.

However, the government decided to abandon the idea because it determined it would not be able to obtain local residents' acceptance of office closures if there is an emergency.

A new form of compensation

June 26, 2012

TEPCO reveals plan to compensate prefectures for tourism losses

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120626p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) revealed a plan on June 25 for compensation standards for tourism losses caused by the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

The standards cover five Tohoku region prefectures excluding Fukushima Prefecture in cases where there were travel reservations held for groups including youths 18 or under from outside the Tohoku region as of March 11, 2011, the day of the massive earthquake that struck the region. The standards are being considered to cover cases where reservations were canceled by April 22, 2011, and to set the compensation at 50 percent of lost profits.

The plan was revealed at a meeting in Yamagata with an inn and hotel association and was the first time that compensation standards at prefecture level for tourism losses from the nuclear disaster were shown in the Tohoku region outside of Fukushima Prefecture. Matters such as whether shoppers will be covered will be discussed later.

After the meeting, the association's top director, Nobuyuki Sato, said the meeting was "a step forward," but also noted, "There are cases where we don't know (visitors') ages at the reservation stage. We will negotiate on matters including an extension of the period covered." TEPCO plans to give explanations on the plan in four other Tohoku prefectures.

On the reason for making the compensation apply to youths 18 or under, the head of TEPCO's Tohoku compensation consultation center Hideo Komatsu said, "Children are very emotionally sensitive to radiation, so we judged that there was a degree of causal relationship (between their canceled reservations and the nuclear disaster)."

Can anything compensate for losses?

June 27, 2012-06-27

Nuclear redress will never approximate losses

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120627a3.html#.T-sqAZFIwpU>

By CHICO HARLAN
The Washington Post



Incalculable loss: Mikio Watanabe holds a photograph of his wife, Hamako, on Monday. He blames Tokyo Electric Power Co. for her suicide and is seeking compensation from the utility. THE WASHINGTON POST

It was 15 months ago that the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant suffered three meltdowns and contaminated a broad circle of countryside and left hundreds of thousands of people without homes, jobs or both.



But for all the damage and despair it wrought, the disaster so far has unfolded without one conventional element: a widespread and contentious legal fight by those who say they should be compensated for their losses.

Victims of the worst nuclear crisis in a quarter-century have filed roughly 20 lawsuits against Tokyo Electric Power Co., according to the utility. That compares with the several hundred suits filed against BP within weeks of the 2010 Gulf oil spill, including the near-finalized settlement of a class-action suit that will pay 120,000 plaintiffs upward of \$7.8 billion. BP also paid out some \$6.2 billion to victims via a neutral claims settlement process, administered by a lawyer appointed by the Obama administration.

Victims and lawyers in Japan say the dearth of nuclear-related suits reflects both a national mindset — a distaste for confrontation — and a stunted judicial system that doesn't allow for class-action cases or punitive damages. Japanese speak of the court system as more likely to deliver frustration than vengeance, and jobless evacuees who urgently need money have little appetite for long trials with uncertain outcomes.

Instead, the vast majority of victims of the Fukushima crisis turn to one of two other options, one led by Tepco, the other by the central government — the two institutions most often blamed for the disaster.

More than nine of 10 evacuees who say the disaster harmed them have taken their claims directly to Tepco. Those who don't want to deal with Tepco or who reject the company's compensation offer can head to a government-created mediation center, which was established by law in the aftermath of the nuclear accident.

Neither route, legal experts say, offers victims much leverage. Typical of a country that sees itself as uniformly middle-class, payouts are adequate but rarely ample. Tepco's average payout so far to individuals is about ¥1.92 million (\$24,000), according to company data. That figure, though, is certain to grow as claimants come back a second and even third time with further evidence of damage, including property losses.

Without the threat of legal action, said Hiroyuki Kawai, a Tokyo-based lawyer handling one of the few lawsuits filed against Tepco, "the state and companies can take advantage of victims." Tepco spokesman Hiroki Kawamata said that is not the case.

For victims who do want to file lawsuits, options are limited. That's because of a special nuclear accident law, drafted 51 years ago, that limits liability to the atomic plant operator, preventing claimants from targeting, say, reactor manufacturers, including Toshiba or General Electric. The law also prevents

individuals from being held liable, effectively blocking suits in this case against executives or workers at Tepco.

The law, experts say, is designed to "maintain order" during mass-scale nuclear disasters. But it also reinforces a feeling of nationwide blamelessness, a notion echoed by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in March, when he said no individuals should be held liable for the crisis.

"I believe everyone has to share the pain of responsibility," Noda said.

Because most nuclear victims head first to Tepco, the utility has dominated the redress process.

Tepco has agreed to give anyone who at the time of the accident was living within 20 km of the plant — the forced-evacuation zone — monthly payments of between ¥100,000 to ¥120,000 (\$1,250 and \$1,500) as compensation for "noneconomic damage," or mental anguish. No end date has been set for the payments, a company spokesman said.

Evacuees may also be reimbursed for hotel stays in the aftermath of the crisis — but only up to ¥7,900 (\$100) per night (the company hasn't specified a limit on the number of nights). One evacuee said he applied for reimbursement for three Geiger counters he purchased, receipts attached; Tepco reimbursed him for one.

"What a joke," said Toshihiko Nakano, 54, a self-employed electrician who applied for some ¥8.64 million (\$108,000) in business damages and was instead offered less than ¥160,000 (\$2,000). Nakano said he's considering going either to the mediation center or to court.

So far, almost 120,000 individuals have applied directly to Tepco for the initial round of compensation, filling out a claims form that was originally 60 pages long. The company has reached settlement agreements in 102,000 of those cases and has since sent out the second and third batches as well, covering additional damages. Tepco estimates it will be responsible, in the end, for at least ¥2.56 trillion (\$32 billion) in compensation.

Lawyers who run the Dispute Reconciliation Committee, the government center that mediates between victims and Tepco, say they are counting on the company to satisfy most of the claimants, if only because the center could be "paralyzed" if too many come to it for help.

Already, about 500 victims a month come to the center, which has offices in Tokyo and Fukushima and settles between 30 and 70 cases a month. Officials expect it will take three to five years for most claims to be resolved.

The center — set up in September, around the time Tepco began sending out compensation forms — has tried to speed up the process by allowing its 200 mediators to handle cases by themselves, rather than with the three-member panels it originally used. But the average case takes five months, and officials fear that time frame will increase as the backlog grows. Only about 25 percent of victims who come to the center are represented by a lawyer.

"We are receiving so many pleadings from victims," said Hiroshi Noyama, head of the center's mediation office. "Of course the ideal situation is that Tepco pays enough compensation directly and solves the problem. But the reality is, numerous victims are dissatisfied with Tepco's handling. And the situation is very troubling."

Some antinuclear activists and lawyers say the government — which last month gave Tepco a ¥1 trillion (\$12.6 billion) bailout, putting it under state control — has an incentive to collude with the utility to keep payments low. But so far, the mediation center's recommended settlements — the payouts are still provided by Tepco — have been more generous than those recommended directly by the utility, according to officials at the center.

In only a few instances has a victim grown angry enough to launch a lawsuit.

In April, Tepco received a letter from a lawyer in Fukushima Prefecture. The letter, addressed to (then) Tepco President Toshio Nishizawa, described the evacuation of a chicken-farm worker from the mountain town of Yamakiya, about 40 km from the plant.

Mikio Watanabe lived there in a two-story house with Hamako, his wife of 39 years, who had grown up across the street. They had a greenhouse in the back and a karaoke machine in the living room.

Yamakiya was outside the government's original evacuation zone, but more than a month into the crisis, that changed; the town had become a radioactive hot spot, and people had to leave. The Watanabes moved into an apartment in a city farther from the plant. The conditions were rough — they hated the tiny quarters and thin walls — and Hamako cried a lot, according to court documents and Watanabe's own account. Hamako started taking sleeping pills. The chicken farm closed, and both lost their jobs. They still owed ¥11.2 million (\$140,000) on the house.

On June 30, 2011, the couple went back to their old house for a day. They spent the night.

The next morning, Hamako went outside, poured gasoline on herself and lighted a match. Mikio found her body.

The letter blamed Hamako's suicide on the nuclear disaster. It blamed the disaster on Tepco. And it asked for about ¥58.4 million (\$730,000) in compensation.

A Tepco lawyer, Masaki Iwabuchi, replied two weeks later.

"Regarding whether we are indebted to pay compensation," the letter said, "we must first consider detailed health conditions that led to (Hamako's) suicide. At this point we cannot give you an answer" on compensation. "If you can provide detailed documents, we will sincerely consider the case."

Watanabe's lawyer, Tsuguo Hirota, said recently that the response felt dismissive, particularly by the standards of a language in which little is said explicitly. Hirota advised Watanabe to try a rare tactic: They should go to court, he said, and make Tepco feel sorry. Watanabe agreed. "I can't hold back my anger," he said.

So on May 18, Watanabe filed a lawsuit at the Fukushima District Court blaming Tepco for his wife's death and seeking ¥90.4 million (\$1.13 million), including compensation for Hamako's lost future earnings. The case, Hirota said, will take at least two years.

"As for our chances," Hirota said, "that depends on how you define victory. One side of this lawsuit is, we know others in society are suffering. We want to appeal to society at large and show them people can speak up."

Ambiguities surrounding compensation

June 27, 2012

TEPCO head defends utility's safety steps / Katsumata believes nuclear compensation law needs to be revised to stipulate who is responsible

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120626005085.htm>

Tsunehisa Katsumata, chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Co., says the safety measures the utility has taken at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are "sufficient."

In his first interview with The Yomiuri Shimbun since the March 11, 2011, disaster triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima plant, Katsumata said, "We take note of all new information [such as from the government and academic societies] and make decisions based on established findings."

Asked about a report that then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu told the government the company planned to withdraw all workers from the Fukushima plant, Katsumata said, "From the start, we never considered pulling out all our staff."

"The plant director at the time [Masao Yoshida] told the leader of each team to ask suitable people to stay, and about 70 did so," he added.

On another issue, Katsumata criticized the Nuclear Damages Compensation Law as "flawed."

"The law should state whether nuclear power should be handled by the private sector or the state and stipulate who is liable and responsible [for nuclear power]," he said.

Katsumata apparently views the law as a more pressing issue than TEPCO's responsibility as the operator of a plant that caused the nuclear crisis.

"When an accident occurs, can we force [workers] to stay [on-site] if we thought they would die? It's a difficult legal issue," he said.

As for the government's decision to help TEPCO pay compensation by providing public funds totaling 1 trillion yen, Katsumata said, "I think the government reached the conclusion that TEPCO should not go bankrupt because of the enormous burden the public would have to shoulder if the state had to cover all costs arising from compensation, decommissioning of reactors and decontamination."

Katsumata became TEPCO president in 2002 and assumed the current chairmanship in 2008. After the nuclear crisis occurred, he took command to bring the crippled plant under control and dealt with the compensation issue.

He is expected to resign as chairman and become a "shayu" (company friend) of the utility at its general shareholders meeting on Wednesday.

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Ambiguity of compensation law

By Chiaki Toyoda / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

The Fukushima nuclear crisis has shed light on the ambiguity of the Nuclear Damages Compensation Law, which has led to a delay in compensation payments to people affected by the nuclear crisis and implementation of decontamination measures.

The government has decided to review the law, but discussions have made no progress.

The law discharges an electric power company from liability for a nuclear accident caused by a massive natural disaster or social convulsion. TEPCO could ask for this provision to be applied to the crisis at the Fukushima plant.

However, Katsumata apparently believes the utility would not receive public funds and financial aid from banks and could end up going bankrupt if it fights prolonged lawsuits. People directly affected by the crisis and public sentiment would become even more hostile toward the utility.

TEPCO's decision not to take advantage of the provision could mean it cannot effectively be used whenever a nuclear crisis occurs.

The Diet decided to review the law a year after the onset of the nuclear crisis. However, the government has yet to hold discussions on the matter as it has not even decided on a midterm plan on the share of generation of each energy source.

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Responsibility is unclear

The Fukushima crisis also has posed a great challenge to the utility over how to protect the lives of workers who fought to bring the situation under control.

Four days after the disaster hit the Fukushima plant, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan visited TEPCO's headquarters and reportedly said: "Withdrawal is impossible. It doesn't matter if senior officials aged over 60 go to the site and die."

Kan's reported action indicates the nation lacks clear legal provisions on responding to a serious nuclear accident. Discussions, such as whether nuclear power should be managed and operated by the state, are needed.

Asked how he would have dealt with the crisis if it had become more serious, Katsumata said it was legally difficult for the company to order its staff to stay at such a dangerous site.

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Who should cover costs?

The law is also unclear as to whether TEPCO or the state should pay compensation and shoulder the cost of decommissioning the reactors and decontamination.

The government believes TEPCO should pay for decommissioning of reactors and the decontamination work. It also thinks the cost of decontamination already paid by the central and local governments should eventually be repaid by TEPCO. However, if TEPCO is forced to foot the entire bill, the utility could go bankrupt.

If that happens, TEPCO's stocks would become scrap paper and creditor banks would suffer massive losses. Problems in the framework that supports TEPCO may become more evident and a review on the law will become inevitable.

Compensation

June 27, 2012

TEPCO head defends utility's safety steps / Katsumata believes nuclear compensation law needs to be revised to stipulate who is responsible

The Yomiuri Shimbun

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Backlash from evacuees - TEPCO apologizes

June 29, 2012

TEPCO execs get tongue thrashing on visit to nuke disaster evacuees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120629p2a00m0na008000c.html>

KAZO, Saitama -- Top executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) apologized on June 29 to some 150 residents evacuated here from the no-go zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

TEPCO Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe and President Naomi Hirose visited an evacuation shelter in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, where the Fukushima Prefecture town of Futaba has moved its office functions following the nuclear meltdowns.

After making their apology, the executives were met with a strong backlash from evacuees in the former high school gymnasium-turned-shelter.

"I want you to live here with us, starting today. You should move into action only after learning the mental conditions we've been living under here," said a male resident evacuated from Futaba. Other evacuees also heaped criticism on and expressed dissatisfaction with the utility over the nuclear crisis.

Prior to the meeting, Shimokobe and Hirose met Futaba Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa.

"We sincerely apologize for having you lead a very inconvenient life here. Our renewed apology will mark the start of a new TEPCO," the executives said.

"Many of our townspeople are exhausted and spending their time here hopelessly every day. They are full of distrust (for TEPCO), and we want you to take firm responsibility for compensation," said Mayor Idogawa.

In reply, TEPCO President Hirose said, "We're really sorry for the fact that the reparation issue hasn't made progress. We'll strive to improve the situation if only a little at a time."

The TEPCO executives had earlier visited Fukushima Prefecture on June 28, where they met Gov. Yuhei Sato. They will also visit 13 municipalities around the troubled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, including the town of Futaba, between June 29 and July 3.

Teleconference records (March 11-30, 2011) should be preserved

June 29, 2012

TEPCO shareholders seek to preserve teleconference records over nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120629p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Representatives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) shareholders asked the Tokyo District Court on June 29 to preserve recordings of the utility's teleconferences made during the opening weeks of the Fukushima disaster in a bid to pin responsibility for the crisis on TEPCO executives.

Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said at a news conference, "The recordings are first-class data in the pursuit of individual executives' liability. They are the Japanese people's common property, so we may all know what happened at the time of a historic catastrophe."

In a written petition, the plaintiffs are seeking the preservation of teleconference recordings from March 11, 2011 -- the day the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck and the nuclear crisis began -- to March 30 as evidence.

The plaintiffs say they believe the recordings can prove former and current TEPCO executives and others neglected the possibility of a severe earthquake and tsunami and failed to take appropriate safety measures at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Plaintiffs also believe the recordings will reveal how respective TEPCO executives behaved when the nuclear plant operator was late to vent pressure inside the stricken nuclear reactors and inject seawater into them to prevent the reactor cores from being exposed.

TEPCO is refusing to release the teleconference recordings, citing privacy concerns. But the shareholder representatives maintain that the recordings could be erased once investigations by the government and a parliamentary investigative panel are over.

The video teleconference system can connect multiple participants in different locations. TEPCO's teleconference system at the time of the nuclear disaster linked TEPCO headquarters in Tokyo with the Fukushima plant's disaster response headquarters building and the utility's off-site base in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, among other locations.

How to escape ?

July 2, 2012

Residents ponder escape routes as restart begins

For local residents, lack of escape routes is a more serious matter

By ERIC JOHNSTON

Staff writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120702a1.html#.T_GoY5FIwpU

Oi, Fukui Pref. — Hundreds of out-of-town protesters gathered Sunday evening at the Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture in a last-ditch attempt to stop the reactivation of its No. 3 reactor.

Down to the line: A protester holds up a sign saying "Stop the restart" outside the Oi nuclear plant Sunday in Fukui Prefecture. Police formed a line to block protesters near the site's main gate. KYODO



The Oi plant is the first in the country to be reactivated after inspection since last year's Fukushima nuclear crisis. All the nation's commercial reactors have been offline since early May.

Kansai Electric Power Co. said it began extracting the control rods from the core of the No. 3 reactor at 9 p.m. The utility aims to achieve criticality — or a sustained fission chain reaction — early Monday and to begin transmitting power on Wednesday. Full operation will likely be possible by July 8.

The area around Wakasa Hongo, Oi's main train station, was quiet Sunday. Many residents, though resigned to the restart, are worried about how to escape in the event of an accident at the plant, which is on the coast of the Sea of Japan.

On Sunday afternoon, several hundred protesters blocked the main access road from Oi to the reactors. About 650 had gathered near the plant Saturday night, but the heavy afternoon rains had reduced their numbers somewhat, said Uiko Hasegawa, a Kyoto resident who joined the protest.

"At the moment, the road is blocked by between 200 and 300 protesters. People from all over Japan, but mostly Kansai, are here demonstrating, although I haven't seen Oi residents," she said.

Although protesters have been blocking the road since Saturday to prevent workers from reaching the plant, Kansai Electric said Sunday it already had enough on hand for the restart.

When it finally reaches full capacity, the 1.18-million-kw reactor is expected to help cut the utility's projected power shortfall to 9.2 percent from 14.9 percent this summer. Following government approval June 16, Kepeco began preparing to restart the No. 4 reactor, aiming for full service later this month.

For Oi residents, the months of constant media coverage have strained relations with other parts of Kansai. On Sunday, few were out in the streets — and not simply because the heavy rains had disrupted train services. Nearly 60 percent of Oi's budget for fiscal 2012 comes from nuclear power-related subsidies.

Businesses, especially in the service industry, such as taxi companies and hotels, rely heavily on the workers and officials the reactors bring in.

"Such customers are important to many taxi drivers in Oi, but that doesn't mean everyone in Oi's service industry is pronuclear," said Takanori Hirono, a local taxi driver. "Many people, even those making lots of money from the influx of nuclear power workers, are concerned about an accident."

For other residents, the real concern is not the finer points of the plant itself, but what to do if an evacuation becomes necessary. Based on a simulation it ran last week of what would happen if people panicked and fled by car, Fukui Prefecture estimates it could take over eight hours to reach major cities like Tsuruga.

In a series of public service videos on Oi's website, produced in cooperation with Kansai Electric, an official asks that residents go to evacuation centers instead of flocking to the roads. Oi officials explain there are evacuation plans for those living within a 3-km radius of the plants. The plans assume the wind is blowing to the east when the accident occurs, and that those who live up to 7 km due east of the reactors will remain indoors.

Oi's reactors sit on the tip of a peninsula that juts into Wakasa Bay. One train line runs along the coast between Wakasa Hongo and Tsuruga, to the northeast, and Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, to the west. Trains are infrequent and are often canceled due to heavy rains, high winds or blizzard conditions. Normally, it's about 30 minutes to Higashi Maizuru Station, where there are express trains to Kyoto and Osaka, and

about an hour and 20 minutes to Tsuruga, where evacuees can take express trains to Kyoto or Nagoya, or board a ship.

If the trains stop, or panic ensues, people will take to the roads. Route 27, the road closest to the Oi reactors, runs along the coast and is mostly two-lane, with frequent traffic lights.

A few kilometers to the south of Route 27 is the Maizuru Wakasa Expressway, which goes down south to near Kobe. Construction of a 39-km section linking Obama, a few kilometers to the east of Oi, to Tsuruga, where there are good train and road connections to Osaka, Nagoya and elsewhere, will not be completed for another two years.

Kyoto could bear the brunt of a mass exodus from the Oi area by rail and road. Routes 367 and 162, from the Oi and Obama areas, go to Kyoto. Those fleeing Tsuruga or towns east of the Oi reactors by car might travel south on the Hokuriku Expressway until they hit Maibara, on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa.

From there, the choice is to head east to Nagoya and Tokyo by road, or train, or make a run south through Kyoto and try to reach the airports and ports of Osaka. The other main option is Route 161, from Tsuruga, down the western shore of Lake Biwa, to Otsu, Shiga Prefecture, and then to Kyoto and Osaka.

But Oi residents told Tokyo officials in April that even those who managed to make it to Kyoto or Osaka would likely be shunned, due to fear of radiation contamination. What is needed, they said, is a comprehensive evacuation policy that ensures not only that Oi residents can get out in time, but that they will have someplace to go once they escape.

Until then, they say, regardless of whether the Oi reactors are safe to restart, there will always be the kinds of risks that may not be the top priority of those from outside the town protesting the restart, but are of vital concern to their own well-being.

Information from Kyodo added

Electricity conservation - What it means for the population

July 2, 2012

Power-saving measures kick in

Curbs till September; only Okinawa exempt

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120702x3.html#.T_GoJ5FIwpU

Kyodo

Government-imposed electricity-saving targets took effect Monday to cope with power constraints caused by the loss of nearly all nuclear power capacity following the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011.

Although the government refrained from issuing a compulsory electricity-saving order as it did in some areas last summer, this is the second summer a power-conservation request has been made.

All parts of the country except Okinawa, whose power is nonnuclear, have been asked to conserve electricity through Sept. 28 as much as possible.

Households and businesses served by six utilities in wide areas have been asked to voluntarily cut power use by 5 to 15 percent through Sept. 7 to cope with the usual rise in air conditioning use in the summer.

The highest target — 15 percent — was imposed on the area served by Kansai Electric Power Co., which includes the major cities of Osaka and Kyoto.

The drive prompted offices and shops to cut back on air conditioning and lighting.

Coca-Cola (Japan) Co. and its bottling companies will rotate the use of refrigeration in their vending machines every two hours. Kyushu Railway Co. plans to reduce the frequency of trains in and around the city of Fukuoka.

If power consumption is deemed likely to surpass 99 percent of utilities' supply capacity in spite of the power-saving drive, the government will implement rolling blackouts in four service areas where supply capacity is deemed especially tight.

Although government officials say the chances of that happening are small, preparations are now under way to cope with unexpected glitches, such as a thermal power plant breakdown.

The four utilities are Kansai Electric, Kyushu Electric Power Co., Hokkaido Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co.

Kepeco rebooted a reactor at its Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture Sunday to help alleviate possible power shortages this summer. It was the first reactor to be switched back on after regular checks since the meltdown of three reactors at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The Oi plant's reactor 4 is also slated for restart later this month, but the rest of the nation's 50 commercial reactors remain idled amid lingering public concern over nuclear safety.

Before the March 2011 meltdown crisis started, the nation relied on nuclear power for nearly 30 percent of its electricity output.

The government has set a target of reducing power consumption by 10 percent from the 2010 level for Kyushu Electric's service area, 7 percent for Shikoku Electric's, and 5 percent for areas covered by Hokuriku Electric Power Co., Chubu Electric Power Co. and Chugoku Electric Power Co. 2010 saw record-high summer temperatures.

The power-saving drive will also start in Hokkaido Electric's service area with a 7 percent target on July 23, and end on Sept. 14.

Reduction efforts are being sought from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays, excluding the Bon holiday period from Aug. 13 to 15. Only in Hokkaido, the time frame will be shortened to three hours from 5 p.m. from Sept. 10 to 14.

Once the Oi plant's reactor 3 is confirmed to be generating electricity at full capacity, which is expected Sunday at the earliest, the government plans to ease the power-saving targets for the Chubu, Kansai, Hokuriku and Chugoku regions.

Feed-in tariff system to boost renewables?

July 2, 2012

Feed-in tariff era gets under way

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120702a2.html#.T_GpKJFIwpU

The feed-in tariff system for renewable energies entered into force Sunday to help promote their use and cut Japan's dependency on nuclear power.

The system requires utilities to purchase all electricity generated through solar, wind, water and geothermal power, among other eco-friendly sources, at fixed rates for up to 20 years. **The costs will be passed onto consumers.**

The government's generous tariff rates have created considerable interest in the sector, with companies rushing to build massive solar and other power plants based on renewable energies.

Two large solar installations went online in Kyoto, Gunma, Niigata and Fukuoka prefectures the same day. Meanwhile, Kyocera Corp. plans to construct a 70-megawatt solar facility in Kagoshima Prefecture and is scheduled to establish a special company to oversee the project later this month. Mitsui Chemicals Inc. and other firms also intend to start work on a solar and wind power station later this year.

The government had approved 44 solar or wind power facilities with a combined output of 41,605 kw to join the system as of Thursday, according to an official at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, part of the industry ministry.

Household electricity bills are expected to rise by ¥87 per month on average under the new system, the agency said earlier. This estimate is based on the assumption that general households consume ¥7,000 worth of electricity each month.

As renewable energies are generally more expensive than thermal power generation, the feed-in tariff system was designed to ensure the profitability of such operations and spur more companies to enter the sector.

For example, the utilities will have to pay ¥42 per kilowatt-hour for solar-generated electricity to operators that produce 10 kw or more, over the next 20 years. The same rate applies to facilities with a lower capacity but for a shorter time period — 10 years.

July 1, 2012

Utilities required to buy renewable energy

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120701_03.html

Power companies in Japan will have to purchase electricity generated by renewable energy sources.

Starting on Sunday, utilities will be required by law to buy solar, wind and geothermal energy at fixed prices.

The system is part of efforts to promote the use of recyclable energy and reduce dependence on nuclear power.

The prices are set higher than costs for generating such energy. Solar power is about 50 cents per kilowatt hour.

A number of firms have started renewable energy businesses in anticipation of the new system. Some companies launched their concerns on Sunday.

Major regional power companies plan to increase their prices to cover the costs. An average Japanese household is expected to pay an additional 1 to 1 dollar and 40 cents per month.

Evacuees angry at restart

July 2, 2012

Fukushima evacuees angered by restart of Oi nuclear plant

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201207020085

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

After being forced to evacuate her home following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, homemaker Hideka Mochizuki now finds herself an evacuee in Osaka and relying on nuclear power again.

“We came here to flee from the radiation of (the radioactive materials scattered by) the nuclear power plant (in Fukushima Prefecture). Then, we will be forced to use electricity from the (Oi) nuclear power plant, which restarted the operations of one of its reactors (on July 1),” she lamented.

The controversial restart of the No. 3 reactor at the Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture is angering Fukushima evacuees such as Mochizuki. It marks the first of Japan's 50 nuclear reactors to be brought back online after all had been taken down for regular maintenance or safety checks.

Mochizuki, 41, is currently living in a municipal housing facility in Osaka's Hirano Ward as an evacuee, as her house in Tomioka is located within the no-entry zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Many residents in Fukushima Prefecture were forced to leave their hometowns against their will due to the accident at the plant in March 2011.

"It (the restart) is unbelievable," said Mitsushi Kanno, 61, who formerly lived in Okuma, where the Fukushima No. 1 plant is located. "It is an insult to the people in Fukushima Prefecture to restart the nuclear reactor without promoting measures for more use of natural energies."

After the nuclear accident, Kanno evacuated to Niigata with his wife, Sumiko, 59, and his neighbors. In December 2011, however, he moved to Fukushima city, which is closer to his hometown of Okuma.

When Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said in 2011 that Japan cannot be rehabilitated without the recovery of Fukushima Prefecture, Kanno accepted his words as strong support for his home region.

However, Kanno said, "We are still in agony and are not approaching recovery."
"If the restart (at the Oi plant) is vital for Japan, we will be left behind," he said.

Meanwhile, Hirohisa Suzuki, the fourth-generation owner of a miso (fermented soybean paste) producer in Fukushima Prefecture that has existed since the Meiji Era (1868-1912) still doesn't know when he can return to his hometown or resume operations of his firm.

His company is located in Namie, close to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. But Suzuki, 52, is now living in Toride in neighboring Ibaraki Prefecture as an evacuee.

"It is easy to say that Japan should become a nuclear-free country. But thinking from the perspectives of electricity supply or economy, I can understand that nuclear power generation is necessary," Suzuki said.

However, he said, "The restart (at the Oi plant) is too soon."

"(In the Oi nuclear power plant,) an anti-quake building that can protect workers from high-level radiation has not been constructed yet," Suzuki said. "Measures against tsunami are not sufficient either. It is extremely dangerous to restart the operations of the reactors in such a situation. As one of the evacuees (from Fukushima Prefecture), I cannot support the restart."

Mochizuki said she believes that people in Fukushima Prefecture have become victims of the Tokyo metropolitan area, which consumed much of the electricity from the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

If a similar accident occurs at the Oi plant, she will then be in the opposite position where residents of Fukui Prefecture become the victims of the major power consumption area of Osaka and surrounding municipalities, where she now resides, she said.

According to Mochizuki, Japanese society exists on the premise that nuclear power plants will supply a large part of its power needs. She feels that such a society is a different world from her reality today, in which she was forced to evacuate her home and still does not know when she can return there.

"As time has passed since the accident (at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant), the awareness about the dangers of nuclear power plants could be waning (among the government or supporters of the restart at the Oi plant)," Mochizuki said.

Artist Kazunori Aoyama, 64, and his wife, Fusako, 63, who also used to live in Tomioka, evacuated to Takashima, Shiga Prefecture, after the nuclear accident. They have since committed to living there permanently.

"We sought the place where we would live out our lives with heartbreaking grief. ...We want to have at least some fragments of happiness (here)," they said in a letter they sent to friends living in Fukushima Prefecture as evacuees.

In April this year, Fusako traveled to Fukui Prefecture at the invitation of an acquaintance and saw the sea at Wakasa Bay.

"What a beautiful beach this is!" she thought, and recalled her hometown of Tomioka, which is also facing the sea.

"Due to the nuclear accident (at the Fukushima No. 1 plant), we have lost an important thing," she said.

Litate to help residents

July 3, 2012

litate village decides on reconstruction plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120703_39.html

A village assembly in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture has adopted a roadmap for rebuilding the village before its residents can return home.

litate Village is located northwest of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. All of its residents, numbering over 6,000, evacuated from the village after the disaster at the plant on March 11th last year.

On Tuesday, the village assembly approved a draft reconstruction plan drawn up by a council of experts and former villagers. The move comes 2 weeks before the village is to be divided into 3 types of evacuation zone, designated by radiation level.

The plan calls for setting up a base in the village to help residents return home when decontamination efforts cause radiation levels to fall to a safe enough level. The base will be set up in the Nimaibashi District, where the radiation level is currently lower than in other areas of the village.

The plan also calls for building public housing in the district and promoting renewable energy industry in order to create jobs.

The plan also calls for building public housing outside the village to support young parents who have chosen not to return to the village because of work or concerns about the effect of radiation on the health of their children.

The public housing would be built in Kawamata Town and Fukushima City, where evacuees from litate Village live. There is also a plan for a community center to be open for young parents and their children.

litate Mayor Norio Kanno says facilities will be built in and outside the village to help those who want to return, those who want to return but cannot do so, and those who cannot return.

Want to go back home but can't

July 3, 2012

Evacuees give up on no-go zone

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120703a5.html#.T_MFmZFIwpU

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA — About 40 percent of evacuees from the town hosting the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have no intention of returning there, a recent poll indicated Monday.

Releasing the results of the poll on 10,025 residents of Okuma, which is within the no-entry zone, Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe said at a press conference, "**Many residents want to return home but they have judged they cannot do so . . .**"

Watanabe also said some respondents who said they will not return home may change their minds depending on progress in work to reduce radioactive materials and compensate them for damage from the crisis triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The town office conducted the poll in May and June and 64.6 percent of all residents responded. It showed 40.4 percent said they will not return to the town, while 39.9 percent said they will wait for the right time to return.

The town mailed questions to the residents from its temporary office in Aizuwakamatsu.

Gov't "temporary town" plan

July 3, 2012

'Temporary towns' in works for Fukushima's displaced

Jiji

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120703a4.html#.T_MFXZFIwpU

FUKUSHIMA — The government said it will support a "temporary town plan" drawn up by four Fukushima municipalities that were evacuated because of massive radioactive contamination caused by the prefecture's nuclear crisis.

The plan was revealed Sunday in a draft of the government's basic policy on reconstructing the prefecture.

It was presented at a meeting in the city of Fukushima the same day attended by local government representatives.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato said afterward that he basically approved the draft.

The policy is set to be formalized at a Cabinet meeting via a special law for rebuilding Fukushima. Tatsuo Hirano, minister for reconstruction of areas damaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami last year, said the decision is expected to be made in the middle of this month.

The temporary town plan being studied by the towns of Futaba, Okuma, Namie and Tomioka calls for setting up schools, administrative offices and other facilities in municipalities where the towns' residents evacuated to.

The four towns were tainted with fallout from the crisis at the poorly protected Fukushima No. 1 power plant after the March 2011 quake and tsunami knocked out all its power, leading to multiple core meltdowns.

The draft policy says the central government will survey the evacuees about the town plan and also said it will prepare a legal framework and other measures needed to establish the temporary towns.

It also will respect the conclusions of the parties concerned, including the four towns and the municipalities being asked to host the new communities.

The draft policy also provided a timetable for the evacuees' return and specifics about measures to promote the four towns' decontamination, compensation for contamination, and employment in the affected areas.

In addition, it calls on the state to draw up a program aimed at bringing about their return in five to 10 years, and says state-owned lots should be used for temporary storage of tainted waste from decontamination while asking the government to urge Tokyo Electric Power Co. to offer parts of sites it owns for radioactive waste storage.

Miyagi students speak

Kyodo

Two students from a junior high school in Miyagi Prefecture that was devastated by the March 2011 tsunami are scheduled to speak about their experience at an international disaster conference this week in the Tohoku region.

The two, representing 64 second-year students at Onagawa Daiichi Junior High School in Onagawa, will present strategies to reduce casualties, drawing on their own experiences, when they attend the two-day World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction in Sendai and other cities in the region, starting Tuesday.

Around 80 percent of the school's students lost their homes in massive waves triggered by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake on March 11, 2011. The students have been working on disaster strategies for around 15 months as part of their social studies class.

Airi Katsumata, 13, plans to emphasize the importance of life and the need to have emergency supplies ready at all times. Katsumata's great-grandparents and two cousins were lost in the disasters.

The strategies include creating strong community bonds to better persuade people reluctant to evacuate to do so if tsunamis are about to strike.

The tsunami claimed the lives of scores of people who stayed home despite warnings. Many were living alone.

The community-building concept was inspired by the grandfather of one of the students. He died in the tsunami while trying to help others living alone to escape.

Besides demonstrating how well it has recovered from the calamity, Japan also aims to take a leading role in helping developing countries invest more on disaster risk-management.

Ministers from around 30 countries and leaders of international groups will be at the conference.

TEPCO to reduce power tariff increase

July 3, 2012

TEPCO will likely need to trim electricity tariff hike

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120703p2g00m0dm036000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. is expected to be asked to trim its planned 10.28 percent electricity rate hike for households, as a panel under the industry ministry compiled a draft proposal on Monday that did not support all of what the utility hopes to pass on to customers.

In Japan, utilities are allowed to pass on costs for supplying power, including personnel and fuel expenses, plus a certain margin, to household customers.

The panel studying the appropriateness of the rate hike urged the utility not to include as costs donations to local governments hosting nuclear power plants as well as some advertisement expenses for nuclear power.

It also said the operating margin -- a profit gauge for an electricity utility -- should be reduced by around 10 billion yen from 281.5 billion yen projected by TEPCO.

As for fuel and personnel expenses, which have been criticized as being estimated relatively high, the panel basically agreed to allow the utility to pass on the costs as requested.

Based on the panel's proposal, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano will make a final decision on the rate hike.

The utility known as TEPCO has applied to raise electricity rates by an average of 10.28 percent because it is facing increasingly tough business conditions in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant crisis last year.

TEPCO sought the rate hike in line with its 10-year restructuring plan compiled with a state-backed bailout fund, which includes a public fund injection of 1 trillion yen and over 3.37 trillion yen worth of cost-cutting efforts.

Power shortage in Japan

July 3, 2012

Japan heads into 2nd summer with power shortages looming

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201207030064

Japan entered a power-saving mode on July 2 with all 50 of its nuclear reactors shut down but one, with particularly demanding targets set in the western part of the nation.

The government has called for a 15 percent cut from 2010 levels in Kansai Electric Power Co.'s service area, a 10 percent cut in Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s service area and a 7 percent cut in Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s service area.

The numerical targets will remain in place until Sept. 7.

The government will also call for a 7 percent cut in Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s service area from July 23 to Sept. 14.

In addition, customers of Chubu Electric Power Co., Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Hokuriku Electric Power Co. have been asked to cut power consumption by 5 percent to supply electricity to Kansai Electric.

The No. 3 reactor at Kansai Electric's Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture was restarted on July 1. When it reaches full operations around July 8, the target for Kansai Electric will be lowered to 10 percent, and those for Chubu, Chugoku and Hokuriku Electric will be reduced to 3 to 4 percent.

Kansai, Kyushu, Shikoku and Hokkaido Electric are making preparations for possible rolling blackouts to prevent an unexpected outage.

Hokkaido Electric was flooded with 3,900 inquiries on July 2 after it announced area groupings for a rolling blackout.

In conjunction with the targets, major companies and railways have introduced power-saving plans, with a major effort being made in the western part of the country.

Daiwa House Industry Co., a major home builder, plans to cut power consumption by 30 percent from 2010 levels.

The company installed 256 lithium-ion storage batteries at its 23-story headquarters building in Osaka in June.

The batteries, each with a capacity of 2 kilowatt-hours, are recharged at night and used to power personal computers and desktop lighting from 1 p.m. to lower peak demand.

Panasonic Corp., which operates a number of factories in the Kansai region, will move up summer holidays from the traditional Bon period in mid-August.

About 1,000 employees at the company's headquarters in Kadoma, Osaka Prefecture, will take their days off between July 23 and July 27.

Kyushu Railway Co. will cut back on services to reduce power consumption. Runs will be suspended or shortened for 17 trains per day, including limited express, while the number of cars will be reduced for nine trains.

Convenience store chain Lawson Inc., which plans to cut power consumption by 25 percent from 2010 levels, raised temperatures for store air conditioners by 2 degrees and those for beverage cases by 1 degree on July 1.

The company also turned off lighting for cases for frozen foods and beverages in plastic bottles and also blacked out parts of store sign illuminations.

Coca-Cola (Japan) Co. and Fuji Electric Co. plan to introduce a beverage vending machine that can cut daytime electricity consumption by 95 percent as early as winter.

The companies increased the use of vacuum insulation panels and improved the door's airtightness. Pre-release experiments began on July 2.

Beverages will be kept at 5 degrees or lower for 16 hours during the day if they are cooled for eight hours at night, according to the companies.

All power-saving targets are nonbinding, unlike orders put in place in the service areas of Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co. last summer following the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

No targets have been set for the service areas of TEPCO and Tohoku Electric Power this year. The two companies plan to increase output at thermal power stations to meet summer demand.

Public opinion favors reducing TEPCO's salaries

July 5, 2012

TEPCO workers' salaries may be reduced further

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120704005098.htm>

The government is considering cutting the salaries of Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees by an additional 10 percentage points, to offset an expected reduction in the utility's planned rate hike, it has been learned.

TEPCO has applied to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry to increase electricity charges for general households by an average 10.28 percent.

After the crisis began at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March last year, the utility cut annual salaries of its regular employees by 20 percent. But the company continued to face public criticism over its relatively high salaries.

In response, the government began discussing further pay cuts, following the example of Resona Holdings Inc., which also received a capital injection from the government, in the hope of gaining consumers' understanding.

Under the current wage cut introduced after last year's disaster, the average annual salary of TEPCO workers is expected to be 5.56 million yen between fiscal 2012 and fiscal 2014.

If the salaries are cut by the additional 10 percentage points, the employees' average annual salaries would decrease to about 5 million yen.

An expert panel in the ministry already proposed reducing the company's "business returns," part of which are used to make interest payments on debts. Taking such a measure, the panel indicated the utility should reduce its planned rate increase to less than 10 percent.

The panel will compile its review policies as early as Thursday, after which TEPCO will apply to the ministry with a new rate hike figure, which will be further discussed at a meeting among ministers concerned.

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Public opinion behind pay cut

The latest move by the government is aimed at defusing opposition among consumers to the planned rate hike by strictly reviewing the company's high-cost structure.

As measures included in a comprehensive special business plan TEPCO compiled with the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, the utility cut annual salaries by 20 percent for general employees and by 25 percent for management last year.

In the latest proposal, the government will ask the company to carry out an additional five- to 10-point pay cut.

Under the current electricity rates, which were revised in 2008, the company set the average annual salaries for its employees at 7.07 million yen.

However, the average annual salary for domestic electricity and gas firms with more than 1,000 workers is about 6 million yen, which put TEPCO's high-cost structure into question.

In applying to the ministry to raise the electricity rate by 10.28 percent, the utility lowered its employees' salaries to 5.56 million yen, which it said were in line with "average salaries across companies in the industry with more than 1,000 employees."

However, during the ministry's screening of the requested rate hike, a consumer group pointed out the case of Resona Holdings, which cut its employees' salaries by 30 percent.

Also, compared to average annual salaries across all industries, including small and midsize companies, TEPCO's salaries remain high. Under the circumstances, the government is believed to have decided to seek an additional pay cut.

Still, if the utility cuts its workers' salaries by an additional 10 points, the amount generated would not even offset the one percentage point reduction to its planned rate increase.

TEPCO's electricity charges are calculated based on the overall cost of supplying electricity, to which it adds a certain amount of profit.

In its rate hike request to the ministry, TEPCO stipulated 5.7 trillion yen as its total costs, which included a labor cost of 348.8 billion yen that also covers welfare expenses. Of this amount, which accounts for 6 percent of the total costs, 244.4 billion yen is set aside for salaries.

TEPCO has opposed an additional pay cut, arguing that it would lower the morale of employees engaged in restoration work at the crippled Fukushima power plant.

The workers union, which accepted the cut in annual salaries last year, are likely to oppose a further cut, making the negotiations tough-going.

Fair is fair

Fukushima inmates given compensation

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120704003852.htm>

FUKUSHIMA (Jiji Press)--More than 80 inmates in Fukushima Prefecture have received 80,000 yen each in resident compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co. for the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, it was learned Wednesday.

Eligible for the compensation are people who lived in 23 municipalities in the prefecture, including Fukushima city, when the massive earthquake and tsunami devastated the plant on March 11, 2011.

About 1,700 inmates were at the Fukushima prison and its branches when the disaster struck, the prison said.

As some prisoners learned about the compensation from newspapers and other sources, they asked TEPCO to send them necessary documents and made applications by mail.

TEPCO initially tried to send inmates notices about the compensation scheme. But the prison refused to provide the names and other personal information of the inmates, citing privacy concerns. "Prisoners also suffered psychological damage," a TEPCO official said.

Could SPEEDI have helped?

SPEEDI would not have helped evacuation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120705_31.html

A Diet-appointed panel investigating the Fukushima nuclear disaster says the government's system for predicting the spread of radiation is not accurate enough to be a basis for issuing evacuation orders.

The SPEEDI system uses weather information to predict the direction a nuclear plume will spread from a damaged plant.

The government began making SPEEDI forecasts from the day of the accident, but did not publicize them for a month. Officials said they did not release the information because they could not obtain data from monitoring posts near the plant. The posts were destroyed by the March 11th earthquake.

The panel's report says weather data is not accurate enough because of ever-changing rain or wind conditions.

The report concludes that a lack of radiation data and limited weather information means SPEEDI is not accurate enough to be used as a basis for setting up evacuation areas.

The panel says the government misled residents by not explaining the limitations of the system.

Two other panels looking into the Fukushima accident came up with a different conclusion about SPEEDI in their final reports.

A government-appointed panel said if SPEEDI had been able to use the radiation data, it would have helped evacuees choose the right route.

Another panel, set up by a private think-tank, said the government should have taken better advantage of SPEEDI to reduce residents' exposure to radiation.

10.28% increase : no way

Two articles on the same subject in today's Mainichi: Panel urges TEPCO to trim 10.28% household electricity rate hike plan

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120705p2g00m0dm082000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An industry ministry panel decided Thursday to propose that Tokyo Electric Power Co. reduce some of the costs it plans to pass on to customers by raising electricity rates, suggesting that the utility's planned 10.28 percent rate hike for households will be lowered.

The panel did not include in its report compiled the same day a specific rate hike percentage it would recommend to the utility known as TEPCO, which is struggling to overcome tough business conditions in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster last year.

But sources have said that the rate hike could be below 10 percent as the report calls for the need to cut expenses earmarked for repairing power generation facilities and to review the rate of what is known as "business return," which is similar to profit for ordinary companies and which the utility uses for interest payments and dividends.

Based on the proposal, the utility is expected to reapply for a revised percentage rate hike to Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano, whose permission is required, hoping to realize the raise on Aug. 1.

TEPCO initially applied to Edano on May 11 to raise household electricity rates by an average 10.28 percent, based on an estimate that total costs will average 5.72 trillion yen per year during the three years from fiscal 2012.

Utilities in Japan are allowed to pass on to household customers costs needed to provide power, such as fuel and personnel expenses, and a certain level of business return.

The panel said in the report that it screened the costs in line with the basic idea that it will not allow the utility to pass on such expenses as advertisements for purposes other than public interest and donations it has given out to various entities.

As for personnel expenses, the panel acknowledged that the utility's calculation is reasonable, but noted that there are "strong calls to further reduce the wage level" as the company will receive an injection of public funds and effectively be placed under state control.

The panel also accepted the need to pass on expenses to maintain the stable condition of the crippled Nos. 1 to 4 units at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, as well as costs to outsource some clerical work to deal with accident-related compensation claims, such as receiving written requests or taking calls.

TEPCO has vowed to cut more than 3.37 trillion yen in costs during the 10 years from fiscal 2012, which began in April, but it has said it still needs to resort to a rate hike amid the increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the halt of nuclear power generation following last year's Fukushima accident.

The increase in electricity bills is one of the key measures that TEPCO sees will help it turn its business around, together with a 1 trillion yen injection of public funds.

TEPCO's household electricity rate hike to be set below 10%: sources

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120705p2g00m0dm038000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An industry ministry panel is expected to urge Tokyo Electric Power Co. to cut expenses for repairing power generation facilities, in addition to other costs, suggesting that the utility's electricity rate hike for household would fall below 10 percent from the initially planned average of 10.28 percent, sources close to the matter said Wednesday.

The panel is close to reaching a conclusion on whether the utility, which is facing serious financial difficulties in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster, has appropriately calculated costs required for supplying power because the costs will be passed on to customers in its services area including Tokyo.

As early as Thursday, the panel plans to compile a proposal on the issue, which will be submitted to Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano, who has authority to give permission to the electricity rate hike issue.

The utility known as TEPCO applied to Edano on May 11 to raise household electricity rates by an average 10.28 percent from July 1, based on an estimate that total costs will average 5.72 trillion yen per year during the three years from fiscal 2012.

The total costs include 420.5 billion yen of repair expenses, but the panel believes several percent could be cut by increasing competitive contracts, the sources said.

Based on the discussions at the panel, TEPCO is expected to reapply a revised percentage rate hike to Edano so that it can realize the move from Aug. 1.

In Japan, utilities are allowed to pass on to household customers costs needed to provide power, such as fuel and personnel expenses, and a certain business return, which is used for interest payments or dividends.

The panel has already asked to reduce the business return by about 10 billion yen.

TEPCO has vowed to cut more than 3.37 trillion yen in costs during the 10 years starting from fiscal 2012, but it has said it still needs to resort to a rate hike amid the increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the halt of nuclear power generation following last year's Fukushima plant accident.

The increase in electricity bills is one of the key measures that will help TEPCO turn its business around, together with a 1 trillion yen injection of public funds.

The capital injection is scheduled to be carried out July 25, a move which will put the utility effectively under state control.

Electricity rate increase will be reduced

July 6, 2012

TEPCO expected to trim electricity rate hike to 9.3% or lower

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120706p2g00m0dm031000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An industry ministry panel member said Thursday that Tokyo Electric Power Co. will likely have to trim its planned 10.28 percent electricity rate increase for households by around 1 percentage point, as the panel concluded that some of the costs should not be passed on to customers in line with the utility's request.

Junji Annen, the head of the panel, made the remarks as he submitted the panel's report on TEPCO's rate hike plan to industry minister Yukio Edano, who has the authority to give permission on it.

Edano is expected to make a final decision on the issue later this month, but the operator of the accident-stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant could be asked to further lower the rate hike percentage because the Consumer Affairs Agency is calling for further cuts in personnel costs.

In the report, the panel called for the need to cut expenses earmarked for repairing power generation facilities and to review the rate of what is known as "business returns," which are similar to profits for ordinary companies and used by the utility for interest payments and dividends.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose told reporters after the panel meeting that the company will calculate the total costs again in line with the criteria set by the panel, apparently to reapply for a revised percentage rate increase to Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano.

If permitted, the rate increase is likely to be implemented from Aug. 1 or later.

TEPCO initially applied to Edano on May 11 to raise household electricity rates by an average 10.28 percent, based on an estimate that total costs will average 5.72 trillion yen per year during the three years from fiscal 2012.

Utilities in Japan are allowed to pass on to household customers costs needed to provide power, such as fuel and personnel expenses, and a certain level of business returns.

The panel said in the report that it screened the costs in line with the basic idea it will not allow the utility to pass on such expenses as advertising for purposes other than public interest and donations it has made to various entities.

As for personnel expenses, the panel acknowledged that the utility's calculation is reasonable but noted there are "strong calls to further reduce the wage level" as the company will receive an injection of public funds and effectively be placed under state control.

The panel also accepted the need to pass on expenses to maintain the stable condition of the crippled Nos. 1 to 4 units at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, as well as costs to outsource some clerical work to deal with accident-related compensation claims, such as receiving written requests or taking calls.

Customers would also be asked to share the burden of depreciation costs for the Fukushima Daiichi's Nos. 5 and 6 reactors and the Nos. 1 to 4 reactors at the Fukushima Daini plant, located near the Daiichi complex, as the panel said it cannot make a "definitive judgment that they will not be restarted in the future."

The six reactors were also affected by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan which triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but TEPCO has not made any decision to scrap them and the panel said no major damage has so far been found in their key facilities.

TEPCO has vowed to cut costs by more than 3.37 trillion yen during the 10 years from fiscal 2012, which began in April, but it has said it still needs to resort to a rate hike amid increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the halt in nuclear power generation following last year's Fukushima disaster.

The increase in electricity bills is one of the key measures TEPCO believes will help turn its business around, together with a 1 trillion yen injection of public funds.

Fukushima gov't demands compensation

July 7, 2012

Fukushima Pref. asks TEPCO for 6.3 bil. yen

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120706004173.htm>

FUKUSHIMA (Jiji Press)--The Fukushima prefectural government demanded about 6.3 billion yen from Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Friday for damages related to the crisis at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant that began in March 2011.

For a period between March 11, 2011, and March 31 this year, the prefecture estimates it faced crisis-related costs of about 5.7 billion yen, including purchases of beef cattle from farms near the stricken nuclear plant following the discovery of above-limit radioactive cesium in Fukushima beef.

In the same period, falls in revenues from six prefectural taxes, due partly to companies leaving the prefecture, are estimated to total about 600 million yen.

The prefecture plans to ask the utility for any further accident-related costs it faces going forward.

Reactivation of Oi reactors may not suffice to ensure stable power

July 7, 2012

ANALYSIS

Fukui reactor restarts not enough to let Kepco off power crunch hook

Jiji

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120707a5.html#.T_hNFZFIwpU

Kansai Electric Power Co. will still be pressed to provide enough power this summer despite plans to restart a second reactor.

The reactivation of reactors 3 and 4 at the Oi power plant in Fukui Prefecture will boost Kepco's output capacity by 4.46 million kw, bringing total capacity to 29.88 million kw — just enough to meet its estimate for peak demand but short of the 3 percent buffer usually seen as necessary to ensure stable power.

Output could be affected by problems at one of the thermal power plants being run to offset shortages stemming from the nation's sudden break with nuclear power after the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns.

Households and companies have been urged to save power, but a trade ministry official said that a string of hot days could cause air conditioner use to soar beyond the limit.

"We are on thin ice, since it is impossible to rule out the possibility of large-scale outages," the official said.

The government's endorsement of the Oi plant's safety is meanwhile provisional.

The plant lacks an earthquake-proof facility to use as an emergency control center during emergencies and a filtered venting system to limit the release of radioactive material if the reactors have to be vented. The two facilities are scheduled to be installed in fiscal 2015.

The new nuclear regulator that will be established later this year will have to draft new safety standards and strictly examine operations at the Oi power plant.

Since public distrust of the government and nuclear safety is rife, Kepco will have to emphasize the safety of the Oi plant and make sure any problems are fully disclosed.

Utilities plan bond sales

Kansai Electric Power Co. and Chugoku Electric Power Co. plan to issue bonds this month in what will be their first debt offerings since the nuclear crisis began in March last year, sources said Thursday.

Each is expected to issue about ¥20 billion worth, the sources said.

The companies believe that investor concerns about utilities' financial conditions have eased thanks to plans to restart two of the four reactors at Kepco's Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture. The two utilities apparently believe this has paved the way for them to resume bond issues, the sources said.

The bonds will be redeemed in five years and both have selected brokerages to lead-manage the sales.

The precise issue amounts will be decided after investor demand has been assessed, the sources said.

The credibility of utilities in general has suffered since the nuclear crisis started at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant in Fukushima Prefecture following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami last year.

Tohoku Electric Power Co. has so far been the only one to issue bonds since the start of the crisis.

Issue terms for the coming bonds would be tough, the sources said, noting that Kansai Electric and Chugoku Electric are expected to face higher interest costs than before the nuclear crisis because investors have yet to fully dispel their concerns about the industry's business conditions.

Noda's promises

July 7, 2012

Noda vows to help Fukushima evacuees

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120707_32.html

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has visited a village in Fukushima Prefecture and promised to help villagers who evacuated after last year's nuclear disaster to return home.

The government lifted the no-entry designation for Kawauchi Village this past April. But only 20 percent of the residents have returned.

Noda met children at Kawauchi Village Elementary School to celebrate the Tanabata festival.

He wrote a wish on a strip of paper, praying for Kawauchi children's health and growth.

Children asked him to help restore the environment. The Prime Minister promised to work hard so that lots of children can return to the village.

Noda also visited temporary housing in the village. The residents are not allowed to live in their own homes due to radioactive contamination. They are only permitted to visit their houses for limited hours.

Noda also promised to address the issue of compensation and work to decontaminate the area.

Reduce power saving targets?

July 9, 2012

Japan announces lower power-saving targets

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120709_18.html

Japan's top government spokesperson has announced that the country's energy-saving targets will be lowered in many areas. This comes after the No.3 reactor at the Ohi nuclear plant started operating at full capacity.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said on Monday that the government would ease the target in areas served by Kansai Electric, from more than 15 percent to more than 10 percent.

He said targets would also be lowered in areas covered by Chubu Electric, Hokuriku Electric and Chugoku Electric.

The new targets will go into effect on Tuesday.

Fujimura said government officials believe most of these targets can be lowered further or even removed once the No.4 reactor at the plant achieves full operation later this month.

July 8, 2012

Ohi No.4 reactor to lower power saving target

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120709_03.html

With the No.3 reactor now at full operating capacity, Japan's government will reduce the energy-saving target in areas served by Kansai Electric from 15-percent to 10-percent starting from Tuesday.

The government will remove the numerical targets allocated to Chubu Electric, Hokuriku Electric, and Chugoku Electric when the No.4 reactor achieves full operation later this month.

The government will reduce the target of 7-percent to 5-percent for Shikoku Electric. But the government will keep the reduction target of 10-percent in areas served by Kyushu Electric and 7-percent for Hokkaido Electric.

On the other hand, the government will decide whether it will further reduce the target for the areas served by Kansai Electric after taking local opinions into consideration.

Energy-saving

July 10, 2012

Kansai residents face energy-saving season with mixed feelings

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120710p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Though Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant is pumping electricity onto the grid once more and the energy-saving target for the utility's service area has been cut to 10 percent, customers still have mixed feelings about being "power poor" this summer.

The savings target in the area covered by Kansai Electric stood at 15 percent before the No. 3 reactor at the Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture reached its full output capacity on July 9, but the added power will not be enough to avoid electricity-saving measures, bewildering some residents but encouraging others to shift their lifestyles to meet the new energy reality.

"Saving electricity is the way of the world now," said 28-year-old Natsuki Sazanami from Kobe's Suma Ward. "First off, I've shut off my TV's main power supply. On the other hand, my workplace is now pretty dark and gloomy, department stores aren't cool inside anymore, and I don't think these energy-saving times are very pleasant."

One 59-year-old man from Akashi, Hyogo Prefecture, who moved into an all-electric home two years ago told the Mainichi Shimbun, "I can't do anything if the power goes out. The effect on industry is also pretty severe, so I hope this summer is the last summer we have to go through this."

A nursery school principal in the city of Wakayama, meanwhile, has set the air conditioning at her facility to 28 degrees Celsius and has also installed a generator to guarantee enough power for essential functions, including making up warm milk for the babies.

"Even if we're told the energy-saving target has been reduced to 10 percent, it's very hard to judge how much electricity we can use," she says. "So, we'll do the same thing we'd been planning" before the target reduction.

Shigeo Kubo, a 77-year-old retiree in Yao, Osaka Prefecture, commented, "Whether the reactors start or not, energy-saving is still an issue. Instead of the air conditioner, I'll use a handheld fan or the electric kind, and open windows to let the breeze in."

A 50-year-old company owner in Kyoto's Higashiyama Ward, meanwhile, said that this year he has grown a "green curtain" of climbing plants around his home.

"It looks cool, and it actually lowers the temperature around the windows," he said. "I was against restarting the (Oj) reactors," he added. "I think we need to make the effort to build a society without nuclear energy."

"On my days off, I try to go out more, and lately I've been enjoying going to the Yoshitomo Gion Kagetsu theater to watch shows with my kids," he said.

End of debris disposal a long way off

July 10, 2012

Just over 20 percent of 3/11 debris dealt with

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120710_23.html

Environment Minister Goshi Hosono says one-fifth of the debris generated by the March 11th earthquake and tsunami last year has been dealt with.

Hosono told reporters on Tuesday that, as of the end of June, 3.82 million tons, or 20.3 percent, of the rubble from the 3 most affected prefectures had been incinerated, buried or recycled.

The ministry estimates that the disaster left some 18.8 million tons of debris in the 3 prefectures. Of these, Iwate had 5.25 million tons, Miyagi, 11.54 million tons and Fukushima, 2.01 million tons.

The government has set March 2014 as a target date by which to complete the disposal.

Hosono says that while he feels progress has been made, no plans are yet in place for dealing with incombustible waste from Iwate and flammable debris from Miyagi. He says his ministry will address these issues next.

Wreckage fishing

July 11, 2012

With fishing suspended, Fukushima fishermen return to sea to catch disaster debris

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120711p2a00m0na015000c.html>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- On the morning of July 11, a year and four months after the March 11, 2011 disasters, fishermen here boarded their ships and headed out to sea -- not to catch fish, but disaster debris.

"This is a sea with no exit," muttered Masakazu Yabuki, 75, the head of the Iwaki fishery cooperative. With fishing in the region still suspended due to the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Yabuki's 27-meter-long fishing boat is now used to collect debris from the sea -- a job local fishermen call "wreckage fishing."

On July 11, Yabuki and his fellow fishermen began the day by pouring sake into the sea and taking a moment of silence to mourn those who perished in the disasters. Then they headed out to sea to collect the still vast amount of debris dispersed in the ocean.

"We've gained 30 kilograms," fishermen on the boat smiled bitterly, referring to how long they've been kept from fishing since the disasters. Fishing in the area remains suspended as radioactive contamination exceeding the 100-becquerels-per-kilogram government safety limit for foods was detected in much of the fish caught off the Iwaki coast.

"Even if contamination falls below the safety limit, as long as some radiation is detected no one will buy the fish," Yabuki says. "You know that it's still difficult to sell fish from Minamata, even after the Kumamoto Prefectural Government declared the fish was safe (back in 1997)," the man added.

To support fishermen affected by the disasters, the national Fisheries Agency allocated a combined 36.3 billion yen to commission fishermen and others in related fields in seven prefectures along the Pacific coast from Aomori to Mie, to pull disaster debris out of the sea.

Fukushima's fishermen now live off the "salary" they receive for collecting this debris, in addition to compensation they receive from Fukushima No. 1 plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) every three months -- an amount equal to about 80 percent of the maximum profit they would get in their best fishing season.

Prior to the disasters, Iwaki fishermen used to catch various marine delicacies such as flounder, gosefish and sea urchin that were shipped to fish markets across the country, including Tokyo's Tsukiji. Women would greet the fishermen at the port, and seagulls could be seen in the sky hunting for a tasty morsel. Today, that has all disappeared from the region, even the smell of fish.

"There is nothing worse (for fishermen) than to earn a living while not catching fish," Yabuki said. "But right now, all we can do is be patient. Fishing is the only way of life we know," the fisherman added with a smile. "That is why tomorrow, too, I will head to the sea along with my fellows to catch debris."

Power shortage despite Oi restart?

July 11, 2012

Electric power shortage may be inevitable / Most areas seen affected despite Oi nuclear plant's No. 3 reactor becoming fully operational

Fumitsuki Funaki and Tadaaki Inoue / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120710004095.htm>

Power-saving targets for this summer

Electric power company	From July 2	From July 10	After start of full operation of Oi No. 4 reactor
Hokkaido	7%		
Tohoku	—		
Hokuriku	5%	4%	—
Tokyo	—		
Chubu	5%	4%	—
Kansai	15%	10%	10%?
Shikoku	7%		5%
Chugoku	5%	3%	—
Kyushu	10%		

stands for possible rolling blackouts. — means no power-saving targets.

A prolonged electric power shortage is regarded as inevitable in most of the country, despite Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant's No. 3 reactor in Fukui Prefecture becoming fully operational Monday, power industry sources said.

The No. 3 reactor has an output of 1.18 million kilowatts. The Oi plant's No. 4 reactor is scheduled to resume full operations on July 25.

The resumption of power generation by the two reactors will improve the nation's balance of power supply and demand compared with the situation that existed in the months after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11 last year.

With no prospect in sight that operations will resume at other nuclear power stations, fears of rolling blackouts are bound to linger, the sources said.

Following resumption of full operations at the Oi plant's No. 3 reactor, Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura at a news conference Monday called for power users, especially corporations, to conserve electricity as much as possible.

"As there is always a possibility of something unexpected happening, users are earnestly requested to maintain electricity-conservation targets [up to 10 percent]," Fujimura said.

KEPCO Vice President Jiro Kagawa on Monday expressed strong concern over possible power shortages. "The power supply outlook looks bleak even after resumption of the Oi nuclear plant's No. 3 reactor operations, as the Japan Meteorological Agency says this coming summer may be hotter than usual."

The power-saving target for KEPCO's service area, which was reduced Monday to "10 percent or more" from "15 percent or more," will be cut further once the Oi plant's No. 4 reactor is fully operational.

A federation of seven prefectures, including Osaka and Kyoto, and two Cabinet ordinance-designated cities that are served by KEPCO, however, has hinted that they will not lower the power conservation target even if the No. 4 reactor goes back online.

This is because a cut in the target could result in Kansai residents and companies taking a more lackadaisical attitude toward power conservation, according to the federation.

Many industrial entities covered by KEPCO are also expected to base their power-saving plans on the 15 percent reduction target.

Fujitsu Ltd., which has a number of plants in the Kansai region, including a cell phone factory and a computerized data center, retains its 15 percent power usage reduction plan, which includes cutting back on lights and raising air-conditioning temperatures. "We'll continue our efforts to save electricity by 15 percent or more indefinitely," a company official said.

Sumitomo Electric Industries, Ltd. has been operating in-house power generators at four production bases in the KEPCO service area since Aug. 2.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd. has shifted some of the work at its Kobe shipbuilding yard to nighttime.

KEPCO has projected peak power demand this summer at 27.75 million kilowatts if it is as hot as the summer of 2010.

Friday recorded this season's maximum demand at 21.34 million kilowatts, much lower than the projected peak demand thanks to industrial power-conservation efforts, the utility said.

However, many people in industry say that although major companies can curtail power use relatively easily, small and midsize enterprises and households will face greater difficulty doing so.

KEPCO depends on thermal power generation for about 50 percent of its supply capacity, which is another cause of concern. The utility's thermal power plants stopped working 93 times in fiscal 2011 because of malfunctions or for other reasons, the company said.

Hiromasa Yonekura, chairman of the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren), said at a news conference Monday, "I feel like praying for a cool summer."

Saying he was concerned about power shortages affecting corporate activities, Yonekura said, "A company would have to shoulder extremely high electricity costs if it depended only on in-house power generation."

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Individual efforts needed

Tokyo Electric Power Co. will be able to ensure a stable electricity supply this summer even if there is a severe heat wave similar to the one that occurred in 2010, the utility said.

According to the firm, peak electricity demand this summer will be about 55.2 million kilowatts, less than the available power supply of 57.71 million kilowatts. The surplus capacity of 4.5 percent exceeds the 3 percent rate considered the minimum necessary to ensure a stable power supply.

While the government set power-saving targets for TEPCO's service area last year, it has no plans to do so this year.

However, the utility's estimates are based on the assumption that electricity consumption will fall by 6.1 million kilowatts from the level before the Great East Japan Earthquake through the power-saving efforts of companies and individuals.

Last summer, large-lot users were requested to cut electricity consumption by 15 percent from 2010 levels, forcing some manufacturers to operate factories on a rotating schedule that included weekends.

This summer, however, power-saving measures depend on the voluntary efforts of companies. "Such measures impose a heavy burden on employees," said Akio Toyoda, the president of the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association.

Under the circumstances, it is unclear whether power-saving efforts will turn out as TEPCO hopes. Current power supply systems, which rely heavily on thermal power generation, also pose a risk to stable supplies.

As thermal power plants are operating flat out because of the suspension of most nuclear power plants, there is a greater possibility malfunctions might occur. The 600,000-kilowatt No. 3 unit at TEPCO's Anegasaki thermal power station in Ichihara, Chiba Prefecture, has been suspended since June 23 after the facility was damaged

Chernobyl/Fukushima

July 12, 2012

Ukraine and Japan's radioactive bond

By EDAN CORKILL

Staff writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fa20120712a1.html#.T_6wY5FIwpU

Bedecked in an odd yellow protective suit and wandering through a ruined landscape, the figure could be a member of the first landing party of an invading alien army. And yet, to the Ukrainian audience at the current Kiev Biennale, the scene is immediately recognizable, for it comes from their own recent history. It's Chernobyl.

Sharing history: "Atom Suit Project: Nursery School 4, Chernobyl" (2003) by Kenji Yanobe COURTESY OF YAMAMOTO GENDAI, TOKYO



Taken in 1997, the photograph is by Japanese artist Kenji Yanobe, and it's part of a series of works based on the theme of "revival," particularly in the face of devastating man-made disasters, such as the nuclear accident that occurred in 1986 at Chernobyl, in what is now northern Ukraine. The works, which also reference Japanese pop culture with their robotlike suits and presumptions of impending Armageddon, have made the 46-year-old artist one of Japan's best known internationally. Earlier this year, he was invited by The Japan Foundation to show his art in Moscow — the latest in a long string of international shows stretching back more than 15 years.

But it wasn't until this, the inaugural Kiev Biennale, that Yanobe gained the courage to take his works back to Ukraine, where they would be viewed by the people who suffered most in the accident from which he has long drawn inspiration.

"To be honest, I think what made it possible for me to show the works in Kiev was Fukushima," the artist told The Japan Times recently in Tokyo. "Without such an accident occurring in Japan, I don't think I could have brought myself to do it."

Yanobe's artworks are displayed on the ground floor of the biennale venue — a sprawling 18th-century quadrangle across the road from Kiev's famed Lavra monastery. He and many of the other 100 artists who had been included in the event by artistic director David Elliott (who led Tokyo's Mori Art Museum from 2001 till 2006) were present at its opening on May 23.

Over the ensuing few days, a steady stream of locals filed through the venue, many pausing lengthily at Yanobe's works.

Zenya Marchenko, a 26-year-old artist from Donetsk in Ukraine's east, explained that her mother was pregnant with her when the accident at Chernobyl occurred.

Yanobe's photograph, "Nursery School 4: Chernobyl 1997," shows the yellow-suited Yanobe looking through an abandoned kindergarten. Toys are strewn across the floor, and the alien-like visitor appears to be observing them fondly, pitifully.

"He discovered the history of Ukraine, the local history of Chernobyl," Marchenko said. "It is the childhood of children of Ukraine (who were) born in this kind of place. It is a very sad story, but it's history."

Marchenko added that her uncle, who had been working near Chernobyl at the time of the accident, fell sick and died six months later.

Yanobe told *The Japan Times* that his trip to Chernobyl in 1997 was the culmination of a shift in his career that had started two years earlier, in 1995.

"In the early 1990s I was making works on the theme of 'survival,' " he explained. One of his most celebrated pieces from that time was called "Tanking Machine," a round reinforced steel tank filled with a sodium chloride solution that was heated to body temperature. It formed a kind of womb in which an adult could be kept in a blissful state, oblivious to and safe from the outside world.

"Tanking Machine" was rooted less in any actual necessity than in the escapist fantasies of Yanobe's generation — and in particular, its legions of *otaku* manga and *anime* obsessives.

Then in 1995, Japan was struck by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, which killed more than 6,000 people, and two months later Aum Shinrikyo perpetrated the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

"I had been making works on the theme of survival when all of a sudden survival became a necessity," Yanobe said. "My works started to seem like parody."

The chastened artist decided to shift his focus from self-serving survival-as-otaku-adventure to the idea of "revival" after the kind of calamities that really did threaten humankind. That was when he packed his bags for Chernobyl to create his photographs.

Fifteen years later and the works are receiving a positive, if emotional, response from the Ukrainian visitors to the biennale.

"I have never been to Chernobyl, but I understand exactly what the artist means," said Iler Bondr, 35. Like Marchenko, she also blamed the accident for an illness that ultimately killed one of her relatives — in her case, her father.

Surveying "Nursery School 4: Chernobyl 1997," she said, "A lot of people left things behind that they couldn't take with them."

For Yanobe that particular photograph had another, more subtle meaning, too. "If you look closely you can see there is a child's drawing of a sun on the wall," he said. "I read from that the idea of rebirth from devastation, a revival."

That same image of the sun has since become a recurring theme in Yanobe's art — an optimistic assertion that even in the face of adversity, there is hope.

Ironically, however, this same optimism had long made Yanobe uncomfortable about showing the work in Ukraine. "It is difficult to present a positive message to people who actually had to live with the accident," he said.

But that changed with last year's Fukushima nuclear power plant accident. "I think the Ukrainians are now less likely to see me as being patronizing and more likely to see me as being someone from a country with a similar problem. I'm now a conduit for sharing our experiences," he said.

That sharing has also occasioned some unexpected reactions. For one, everyone in Ukraine seems convinced that Fukushima's accident was "much worse" than Chernobyl's.

"When Chernobyl happened there were no blackouts. But in Japan there was no electricity, so that shows it was much worse," Marchenko said.

Yanobe added that in Moscow there was a similar reaction. "When Chernobyl occurred, Japan was critical of the Soviet Union, so when I showed similar work in Russia, there was a palpable attitude of something like, 'Look who's caused the accident now,' " he reported.

Still, the experience in Ukraine has been positive, and Yanobe is now keen to show his work near the site of Japan's nuclear accident, too. He is currently trying to raise funds so that "Sun Child," a 6.2-meter fiber-reinforced plastic sculpture he made last year, might be included in the upcoming "Fukushima Biennale," a troublingly underfunded event that will be held at Fukushima Airport in August and September.

Like the child's drawing hidden in the ruined nursery in Chernobyl, "Sun Child" also contains clues to the artist's belief that hope lives on, even in the face of adversity. It depicts a young boy wearing a yellow radiation suit, but the boy has removed his helmet and the Geiger counter on his chest is displaying a reading of 0.

"Arsenale 12: The First Kyiv International Biennale of Contemporary Art" (www.arsenale2012.com) continues through July 31. Fukushima Biennale (www.wa-art.com/bien) is scheduled for Aug.11-Sept. 23.

Revival of Fukushima "a matter of national honor"

July 13, 2012

Govt. approves Fukushima rebuilding plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120713_16.html

The Japanese government has approved a basic plan to rebuild Fukushima Prefecture, the home of the nuclear plant that went out of control after the quake and tsunami in March last year.

The plan was approved at a Cabinet meeting on Friday. It cites the revival of the prefecture as the **top priority for national policy**.

The plan also says the government is responsible for the revival and will make the utmost efforts to achieve this as a matter of national honor.

Respecting the prefecture's goal of creating communities that don't depend on nuclear power, the plan says the government will promote the introduction of renewable energy. It hopes the move will help to create jobs as well.

Under the plan, the government will promote decontamination as its responsibility. It will set a goal of reducing the residents' radiation exposure levels to the benchmark of one millisievert per year or lower in the long term.

The plan says **state-owned property will be considered for use as temporary storage for contaminated soil.**

It says the government will subsidize thyroid tests for children to check if they are suffering from health problems due to possible radiation exposure.

The plan does not mention a rise in the subsidies for businesses operating in the prefecture. Fukushima has strongly requested such an increase.

The government says the issue should be considered by taking a balanced approach to other disaster-hit prefectures.

Shelter fatigue most common cause of deaths in over 70-evacuees

July 13, 2012

47 percent of disaster evacuee deaths from shelter fatigue: gov't report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120713p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Forty-seven percent of 529 post-Great East Japan Earthquake deaths investigated in a government probe were from "physical or mental fatigue from life at evacuation shelters," an interim report has shown.

The next most common cause of death was "fatigue from moving to evacuation shelters," at 37 percent, followed by "worsening of illnesses due to ceased hospital operations," at 24 percent, the interim report released July 12 by the Reconstruction Agency found. Around 90 percent of the people who died were aged 70 or over.

The findings were released during a meeting of government bodies discussing the causes of disaster-related deaths and relevant countermeasures. The Reconstruction Agency began investigating 1,263 deaths in 18 municipalities in the three prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima at the end of March. The deaths were among 1,632 it had recognized as disaster-related. By the end of May, it had compiled data on the causes of 529 of those deaths.

Based on death certificates and other information, 249 deaths were found to be from physical or mental fatigue from living at evacuation shelters. Specific examples showed that victims "refrained from drinking

water in environments with insufficient toilet facilities after water supplies were stopped" and "became exhausted after being crammed in the small confines of evacuation shelters."

Cases among 127 deaths resulting from halted hospital operations included those in which victims had been unable to receive treatment because most hospital staff had evacuated, had been unable to take appropriate meals, and had had intravenous drips removed due to the danger of aftershocks.

Dementia a "serious problem" in disaster zone

Sunday, July 15, 2012

Dementia dire among elderly in quake zone

Collapse of communities accelerating mental malaise

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120715x1.html#.UAK5K5FIwpU>

SENDAI — Dementia has become a serious problem among the elderly in the three prefectures ravaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami as the radical change in their living environments continues to take a toll.

In Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, the severity of the disorder is rising in a number of elderly, and several others are showing symptoms.

Experts attribute the problem mainly to a less friendly residential environment and the collapse of local communities following the disasters. Adequate support is not readily available and some now live alone, away from families and friends.

According to a survey in May by a council of doctors in the heavily damaged coastal city of Ishinomaki in Miyagi, 45 people aged 65 or older said they leave their belongings in unknown places or have trouble finding objects at least three to four times a week, or sometimes every day, a sign of early-stage dementia.

The dementia of an 85-year-old woman living in Ishinomaki worsened markedly after the tsunami devastated the city. The dressmaking school she used to run was closed by damage. Since her flooded house was renovated, she has been living alone since her husband died in February.

Her eldest son, 65, is struggling to deal with his mother's illness.

"She even cannot recognize that her husband died," he said.

Following the advice of the doctors' council, he applied to have his mother certified as a person in need of nursing care.

In devastated Minamisanriku, a local government official in charge of resident support said the situation started deteriorating after a year.

"The number of dementia cases started increasing after a year had passed since the catastrophe," he said. This is mainly because residents in each community were forced to live apart and in different temporary housing areas, making it difficult to support each other, the official said.

A survey by Tohoku University said the disasters accelerated the deterioration of people's dementia by three or four years within a matter of just three months. One patient couldn't even tell what season it was.

"This is an unusual phenomenon," said associate professor Katsutoshi Furukawa, 51.

The problem is just as serious in Iwate Prefecture. Yasuo Terayama, 58, a professor at Iwate Medical University, said the symptoms are expanding.

"A growing number of patients are suffering from insomnia and becoming violent at temporary housing," he said.

The number of consultations at the prefecture's medical center for dementia has soared about 2.5-fold since the disasters.

The patients are likely being affected by the stress felt by their family members, experts said. Naoto Kobayashi, 38, a doctor specializing in dementia in the city of Fukushima, said support was crumbling.

"As younger people have left Fukushima due to the nuclear accident, the support system for the elderly has become fragile," he said.

Hiroshi Matsuda, 63, head of a hospital in Kashiwazaki, Niigata Prefecture, said paying attention to those with dementia is critical.

"Dementia patients are vulnerable to stress and it is important to be close to them and listen to what they have to say," he warned.

The only beach in Fukushima prefecture

July 16, 2012

1st Fukushima beach opens since nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120716p2g00m0dm089000c.html>

IWAKI, Japan (Kyodo) -- A beach in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture opened Monday as the prefecture's only functioning beach for this summer, with all other beaches to remain closed following the Fukushima nuclear accident in March 2011.

At Nakoso beach, located about 65 kilometers south of the damaged plant, three local women working as tour guides marked the start of the season on the Marine Day public holiday by swimming in an event that was also spiced up by hula dancers and beach volleyball players.

The radioactive concentration in the seawater is below 1 becquerel per liter, and radiation in the air also poses no health risk, according to the Iwaki city office.

"The water is still cold but it will be a good season. I want many people to come," said Yukiei Hakozaiki, 22, one of the women.

Who should foot the bill?

July 17, 2012

Tuesday, July 17, 2012

FYI

ELECTRICITY PRICE HIKE

Should Tepco customers foot bill for nuclear fiasco?

METI, consumer agency pressure utility but warn price hike is likely

By KAZUAKI NAGATA

Staff writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120717i1.html#.UAVKcPFIwpU>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is desperately trying to raise prices to cover the drastic rise in thermal fuel costs caused by its triple-meltdown disaster at the poorly protected Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

The utility, which is on the verge of nationalization, is effectively being propped up by taxpayers, who are footing the bill for its efforts to contain the crisis and pay what will undoubtedly be staggering redress for the lives disrupted by the emergency it woefully failed to prepare for.

Tepco applied to the government in May to raise rates this month by an average of 10.28 percent, but the plan is still being reviewed.

Will the rate hike be approved? Following are some questions and answers about what's involved with the decision.

How is the rate hike request being handled?

The request is being scrutinized by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Consumer Affairs Agency.

Normally, if a utility wants to raise household rates, it files a detailed application with METI explaining the size of the increase and why it is needed.

The power utilities are effectively regional monopolies. If one runs into financial difficulty or can't generate electricity, random blackouts could ensue. The utilities thus are allowed to set prices to cover

total operating costs plus an "appropriate profit" margin, but any attempt to raise prices must be first be examined by the government.

In Tepco's case, it has been reported that households provide around 90 percent of its income but use only around 40 percent of its power, with the rest going to businesses and local governments.

This discrepancy is what attracted the attention of the Consumer Affairs Agency. METI, the nuclear power promoter that oversees the power industry, has formed a panel of six experts to probe whether the utility is booking unnecessary costs.

After studying Tepco's rate hike plan, the two panels will issue a recommendation that will be discussed by Cabinet ministers. METI chief Yukio Edano will have the final say.

Tepco wanted to hike rates on July 1, so why is it taking so long?

Besides the general public outcry against the hike, the METI panel needs to study the utility's labyrinthine cost structure in depth.

The panel submitted its report to Edano on July 5. The Consumer Affairs Agency's panel is expected to file its report Tuesday.

Media have speculated the hike will be delayed until September.

How did Tepco come up with the 10.28 percent figure?

Tepco claimed its average annual operating costs for fiscal 2012 to 2014 will amount to ¥5.72 trillion. It also faces a jump of about ¥510 billion in annual fuel costs compared with before the nuclear disaster.

But the utility further claims it can generate only ¥5.04 trillion in sales under current electricity rates. To cover this ¥676 billion earnings gap, the utility said it needs the 10.28 percent hike for three years.

How have the government panels responded?

The METI panel wants Tepco to slash ¥50 billion more in operating costs and pare the hike by about 1 percentage point.

It said Tepco should cut about ¥10 billion in procurement costs for liquefied natural gas, which Tepco calculated based on the assumption that LNG prices will continue to soar. But the panel said Tepco should use the latest price quotes and make further efforts to negotiate for price reductions.

The Consumer Affairs Agency panel, which mainly consists of representatives from consumer-related groups, said Tepco's cost cuts should exceed those urged by METI.

Although the METI panel said that Tepco's salary cuts — 20 percent for regular employees and 25 percent for management — are appropriate, the consumer affairs panel said the utility should aim for 30 percent.

The cuts brought the average salary of a Tepco employee down to ¥5.56 million a year, which is nearly on a par with those employed at companies with more than 1,000 employees. The utility, which uses taxpayer money, should reduce its costs more if it wants households to swallow the rate hikes, the consumer affairs panel says.

Tepco President Naomi Hirose asked the public on July 5 to accept its salary plan, saying that the disaster is posing tough challenges that are increasing its employees' workload.

"I'd like to pay (the staff) as much as possible, because they are working under difficult circumstances," he said.

The consumer affairs panel also questions why households should shoulder the ¥48.7 billion Tepco says it costs to keep the crippled reactors at its Fukushima No. 1 plant under control.

Critics meanwhile argue that consumers should not have to pay, via a rate hike, for a crisis that was caused by Tepco and its inadequate safety mindset.

Is there any way to scratch the rate hike?

The government will probably approve it, arguing that Tepco has no choice but to raise rates to cover the massive losses. If approved, it will be Tepco's first household rate hike in 32 years.

Experts warn the increase is unavoidable.

"Tepco probably won't be able to keep supplying power if it doesn't raise rates. Our challenge will be to minimize the increase," Hideki Ide, an economics professor at Keio University and a member of the consumer affairs panel, told consumers on July 13.

Junji Annen, who chaired the METI panel, also said the scrutiny was tough because "whatever decision we make, it affects a lot of people."

If the cut in the hike is too much, it will affect Tepco's management, and if the cut is too little, it will put more burden on consumers, so "it makes no one happy," Annen said after the last panel meeting on July 5.

How are household rates set?

Tepco offers several price plans for the amount of electricity used, but nearly 70 percent of consumers use the same plan.

For that plan, electricity prices basically boil down to three factors — a basic monthly fee, the amount of electricity used per month and a fuel adjustment fee.

The basic monthly fee depends on an individual household's ampere level as contracted with Tepco.

In the Kanto region, this ranges from 10 amps to 60 amps per household. The level is based on what the utility and home designers recommend. Households with higher amperage levels have more available electricity.

The basic monthly ampere fee ranges from ¥273 for 10 amps to ¥1,638 for 60 amps.

As for the amount of the electricity used each month, consumers pay ¥17.87 per kwh for up to 120 kwh, ¥22.86 for 120 to 300 kwh, and ¥24.13 for power use exceeding 300 kwh.

If the 10.28 percent hike takes effect, rates will increase to ¥19.16 for the first 120 kwh, ¥25.71 for the next stage and ¥29.57 beyond 300 kwh.

Tepco says an average household using 30 amperes will pay about ¥480 more a month.

The fuel adjustment fee changes depending on the cost of fuel every three months.

Can households arrange for lower rates?

If households think their ampere level is too high, they can ask Tepco to lower it, and hence the monthly fee.

The Weekly FYI appears Tuesdays. Readers are encouraged to send ideas, questions and opinions to hodobu@japantimes.co.jp

Rezoning of Litate

July17, 2012

Radioactive village rezoned into 3 parts

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120717_07.html

A village in Fukushima Prefecture has been **divided into 3 areas according to accessibility.**

One area has been fenced off because of a high level of radioactive contamination.

Nearly all of the 6,000 residents were removed from litate village after the March 2011 accident at the nearby Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The village was reclassified into 3 areas on Tuesday.

6 fences were set up along the border of the no-entry zone which is expected to be uninhabitable for a long time.

At midnight government officials locked down 3 of the 6 fences with coded bolts. Only people who own homes in the area are allowed to enter using the code, but their stay will be limited from morning to evening. They are prohibited from staying overnight in their homes.

The rezoning is part of the government's review of no-entry and evacuation zones set up in 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture after the nuclear accident.

In litate village, full-fledged decontamination work will start focusing on homes so residents can return.

But there is no plan yet to decontaminate wooded land and paddy fields which cover 85 percent of the village.

Irradiated Iitate to be divided into three radiation zones

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120717b1.html#.UAVJsZFIwpU>

FUKUSHIMA — The village of Iitate on Tuesday will be the fourth municipality in Fukushima Prefecture to have its nuclear evacuation zones rearranged by the central government.

Iitate, whose residents were given a month to leave after the Fukushima No. 1 plant went into meltdown after the Great East Japan Earthquake and showered the village with radiation before the evacuation order was given, will be divided into three radiation zones.

The zones will designate areas delivering annual radiation doses of up to 20 millisieverts, between 20 millisieverts and 50 millisieverts, and over 50 millisieverts.

About 30 percent of the village will fall into the lowest radiation zone, where preparations are to be made to lift the evacuation order and allow businesses to operate. The other 70 percent apparently will be collectively known as the "residency control area," where people will be allowed to make temporary visits to their homes without jumping through the usual procedural hoops.

The Nagadoro district, where about 70 households lived, will be put into the highest zone and be off-limits to everyone for at least five years.

But no residents will be allowed to stay at home in any of the three new zones for the time being.

Iitate is outside the 20-km no-go zone set up around the crippled Fukushima power plant, but the high radiation levels there led the government in April last year to designate the entire village as an evacuation-preparation zone.

Most of the 6,300 or so residents of Iitate fled to temporary housing in the city of Fukushima or elsewhere. The central government plans to attempt decontamination of the village by next March and hopes to complete the process in spring 2014.

Who will return to Iitate?

July 17, 2012

Residents reluctant to return to Iitate despite progress in lifting evacuation zone



Cars are about to pass through an open-barricade area newly set up for a hard-to-return area in the Nagadoro district of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, on July 15. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120717p2a00m0na017000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The central government has reorganized the status of the nuclear disaster-hit village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, from a planned evacuation zone into three areas based on radiation levels, paving the way for many districts to accept the return of residents in several years.

Effective as of July 17, the village was reorganized into three zones -- an area preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders, where residents will seek an early return; an area with restricted residency, where residents will have to wait for several years before they can come back to their homes; and a hard-to-return area, where residents are banned from returning for at least five years.

Despite the village's change of status, however, it is still hard for many residents to plan for their future amid prolonged lives as evacuees in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, with no sign of significant progress in the government's decontamination efforts.

Masanori Aoyama, a 26-year-old electrician from the Kusano district of Iitate, has been living in a leased residence in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Kawamata for 13 months after he and his family evacuated from Iitate on the heels of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Although Aoyama was living with his wife, his grandparents, mother and brother, they were dispersed to three different places due to the evacuation.

"Normally around this time of year, we would have been sleeping listening to a chorus of frogs," lamented Aoyama, looking at his 9-month-old son, Taito. Because Taito was born in October last year while the family was evacuated, he does not know the fresh and cool air of Iitate nestled among the forests.

On July 17, the Kusano district was reorganized into a restricted residency zone with yearly radiation exposure doses of 20 to 50 millisieverts, and seeks to have residents back in several years. However, with a baby susceptible to the impact of radiation, Aoyama is hesitant to take his family back to his hometown.

In a recent questionnaire covering residents of Iitate, 57.5 percent of respondents said they "want to return" to the village, but when it came to the child-rearing generations in the 40s or younger, 54 percent said they "have no intention to return" to the village. While the Iitate Municipal Government is planning to build restoration housing complexes for child-rearing generations outside the village, "the question is when such housing will be completed. If the village is lagging behind, I'd rather build my own house somewhere else at an early date," said Aoyama. The village had once advocated the return of residents to their hometowns in two years, but decontamination work in the village has been largely delayed.

Although an extended family of 10 or more used to be a common sight in Iitate, the nuclear disaster has pushed many in the younger generations to leased residences close to their workplaces or their children's schools while the elderly have moved to temporary housing units. Due to the breakdown in families, the number of households jumped 1.8 times from some 1,700 prior to the nuclear disaster to 3,094 as of June 1 this year.

Aoyama's 57-year-old mother and 28-year-old brother moved to a leased residence in Kawamata because of their work, while his 81-year-old grandfather, Shigeru, and 79-year-old grandmother, Aiko, were evacuated to employment promotion housing in the city of Fukushima, where many fellow residents from the Kusano district are also evacuated.

For Shigeru, whose dementia deteriorated during his life as an evacuee, "it is better to live close to old neighbors," according to Aoyama. Shigeru, however, has few chances to see Taito, his first great-grandson.

Immediately after their evacuation, visions of his hometown came to Aoyama's mind every single day. However, after his close friend -- whom he evacuated with -- died in March this year, he became quite depressed.

"Everyone went back to the village only after they were reduced to bones. Recently, I rarely think I want to return there," said Aoyama.

About Iitate

Over 200 households seek early return to Fukushima village reclassified over radiation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120717p2a00m0na014000c.html>

IITATE, Fukushima -- The Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate was reclassified into three areas on July 17 based on annual radiation exposure, raising hope for about 210 households to return to their homes permanently in the near future for the first time since the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011.

While most Iitate residents will be allowed to resume their business or farming with some restrictions, those residents in an area contaminated with relatively high levels of radiation will continue to face many hurdles years ahead in returning to their hometown.

Iitate village was reclassified into three areas: those in the west and northeast that are getting ready for the lifting of evacuation orders (where about 800 residents in about 210 households are registered); those in residence-restricted areas in the central part to which residents are expected to be allowed to return to live within several years (about 5,260 registered residents in 1,660 households); and those in the difficult-to-return area in the Nagadoro district to which residents will not be allowed to return for the next five years in principle (270 registered residents in about 70 households).

At midnight on July 17, barricades were formed along the routes to the Nagadoro district, turning it into a no-entry zone. Residents had been able to enter the district freely until then. Meanwhile in the Sasu district, which was reclassified as an area getting ready for the lifting of the evacuation order, four elderly residents started cutting grass at a shrine. At 9 a.m. on the same day, during a ceremony held in front of

the village office to send off a neighborhood watch group, Iitate Village Mayor Norio Kanno told about 50 villagers, "In order to spend days as evacuees at ease as much as possible, it is important that one's own home, village and hometown is protected."

The start of full-scale decontamination is expected to be delayed from January this year to around September this year. Under the plan worked out by the central government, entire residential areas in the village are supposed to be decontaminated by the end of March 2014, but the Nagadoro district that is contaminated with high levels of radiation does not fall within the scope of the decontamination plan. Nagadoro district chief Yoshitomo Shigihara, 61, has urged the village and the central government to decontaminate all of the district. "It looks as if only Nagadoro was abandoned. It ought to be decontaminated properly," he said.

Of the 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, Iitate is the fourth to have been reclassified. These efforts have not been going smoothly in the seven remaining municipalities due to concerns mainly about possible differences in the amounts of compensation. Residents in Kawauchi, Tamura and Minamisoma, for which the evacuation orders were lifted in April, are preparing to return to their homes.

8.47%, that's it

July 19, 2012

Corporate customers also get a reduced increase

Tepco is ordered to cut rate hike

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120719x1.html#.UAgsGqBlwpU>

The government said Thursday it will order Tokyo Electric Power Co. to trim its rate hike for households to an average of 8.47 percent from its planned 10.28 percent after determining **the utility can further reduce salaries to limit the additional cost burden on consumers.**

The rate hike, to take effect Sept. 1, along with the planned injection of ¥1 trillion in public funds, is considered essential for Tepco to overcome its financial plight stemming from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Noting that Tepco will be asked to reduce by about ¥83 billion the total costs it initially planned to pass on to customers, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yukio Edano said, "After confirming that Tepco has revised its application (on the rate hike) as ordered, I will give permission."

Under the revised figures, a standard household using 290 kwh a month will see its monthly bill rise by about ¥360 starting with September. In August, the power bill for the average household is expected to be about ¥7,200. A 10.28 percent hike would have raised the payment by ¥479, according to METI.

In line with the revised cost calculation, **Edano said that the average hike of 16.7 percent for corporate customers, which was implemented in April, will be lowered to less than 15 percent. Raising power bills for companies does not need government permission.**

The revised corporate rates will apply from the first month that each business began paying under the rate hike. Businesses that have already paid under the current amount will have their rates adjusted.

Utilities are allowed to pass on to household customers the costs that are needed to provide power, such as fuel and personnel expenses, and a certain level of "business return," which is used for such purposes as interest payments. But raising electricity rates requires the approval of the industry minister.

Because Tepco is struggling due to increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the halt in nuclear power because of the Fukushima disaster, it initially submitted a plan to Edano on May 11 to raise rates by an average of 10.28 percent.

But following the screening process, the government decided to get Tepco to reduce annual salaries of employees in management posts by 31 percent, rather than the planned 26 percent cut, taking into account what other companies have done after receiving injections of public funds, such as Resona Bank.

The government will also urge Tepco to cut procurement costs further, such as by accelerating its plan to introduce more competitive bidding for acquiring fuel.

As for the depreciation costs for reactor 5 and 6 at the Fukushima No. 1 complex and the reactors 1 through 4 at the nearby Fukushima No. 2 plant, the government said that passing the expenses onto customers "cannot be helped" as the utility has not decided to scrap the reactors.

Tepco has so far decided to decommission reactors 1 through 4 at Fukushima No. 1, which were all severely damaged by the March 2011 quake and tsunami.

The cost of outsourcing some office work to deal with accident-related compensation claims and other nuclear plant-related expenses were also permitted to be passed on to customers, basically in line with Tepco's request.

"If these expenses are not counted as costs, Tepco cannot fulfill its social responsibilities to engage in decommissioning and compensation work, and could end up as a burden that would be shared by the whole public," Edano said.

Responding to Thursday's decision, Tepco released a statement saying "it is an extremely tough outcome for our company, but we will wait for final instructions (from the government)."

Given that the rate hike has been concluded, a government-backed bailout fund is expected to inject ¥1 trillion in taxpayer money into Tepco on July 31, a move that will effectively place the utility under state control.

Government agrees to 8.47% electricity rate hike

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120719_27.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company has won government permission to raise electricity rates for households by about 8.47 percent, effective September 1st.

Japan's government agreed to the increase after rejecting TEPCO's initial request for a 10.28 percent rate hike.

TEPCO wants to raise electricity charges to cover massive costs associated with the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The utility also needs to pay for fuel used at thermal power plants as almost all of Japan's nuclear power stations are currently offline.

To lower the margin of increase, the government asked TEPCO to cut the salaries of its management personnel by 31 percent from pre-disaster levels.

It also urged the company to further cut equipment procurement spending by introducing more competitive bidding.

Industry minister Yukio Edano said that after TEPCO has revised its application for the rate hike based on the government's new guideline, he will approve the increase by the end of this month.

Higher electricity charges were already implemented for corporate users in April. In line with the revised rate hike, the margin of increase will be lowered from about 16 percent to less than 15 percent.

TEPCO to be ordered to trim electricity rate hike to 8.47%

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120719p2g00m0dm061000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government decided Thursday to order Tokyo Electric Power Co. to trim its electricity rate hike for households to an average 8.47 percent from the earlier planned 10.28 percent, having determined the utility can further reduce salaries to limit the additional cost burden on consumers.

The electricity rate hike, to be implemented from Sept. 1, along with the planned injection of 1 trillion yen in public funds, is seen as essential for the utility known as TEPCO to overcome its financial plight stemming from last year's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster.

Noting that TEPCO will be asked to reduce by about 83 billion yen the total costs it initially planned to pass on to customers, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano said, "After confirming that TEPCO has revised its application (on the rate hike) as ordered, I will give permission."

Under the revised rate hike percentage, a standard household using 290 kilowatt hours per month would see its monthly bill rise about 360 yen. In August, the total power bill for such households was about 7,200 yen. A 10.28 percent rate hike would have raised the payment by 479 yen, according to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

In line with the revised cost calculation, Edano said that the average 16.7 percent electricity rate hike for corporate users, implemented in April, will be lowered to less than 15 percent.

Utilities are allowed to pass on to household customers costs needed to provide power, such as fuel and personnel expenses, and a certain level of "business return," which is used for such purposes as interest payments. But raising the electricity rates requires the approval of the industry minister.

As TEPCO is struggling due to increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the halt in nuclear power generation following the Fukushima disaster, it initially submitted an average 10.28 percent electricity rate hike plan to Edano on May 11.

But following the screening process for the plan, the government decided to request TEPCO to cut annual salaries of employees in management posts by 31 percent, compared to the current 26 percent, as a three-year average, taking into account the cases of other companies that received injections of public funds such as Resona Bank.

It will also urge the company to further cut procurement costs of materials by accelerating its plan to introduce more competitive bidding.

As for the depreciation costs for the Nos. 5 and 6 reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi complex and the Nos. 1 to 4 reactors at the nearby Fukushima Daini plant, the government said that shouldering customers with the expenses "cannot be helped" as the utility has not decided to scrap the reactors.

TEPCO has so far decided to decommission the Nos. 1 to 4 reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, all severely damaged by the nuclear crisis triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Expenses to outsource some clerical work to deal with accident-related compensation claims and other nuclear plant-related costs were also permitted to be passed on to customers basically in line with TEPCO's request.

"If these expenses are not counted as costs, TEPCO cannot fulfill its social responsibilities to engage in decommissioning and compensation work, and could end up as a burden that would be shared by the whole public," Edano told reporters.

Responding to the government's decision, TEPCO said in a statement, "It is an extremely tough outcome for our company, but we will wait for final instructions (from the government)."

Given that the electricity rate hike issue reached a conclusion, a state-backed bailout fund is expected to inject 1 trillion yen of taxpayers' money into TEPCO on July 31, a move that will effectively place the utility under state control.

New rules for compensation

July 20, 2012

Govt sets compensation rules for Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120720_18.html

The Japanese government has compiled guidelines to speed up compensation for Fukushima residents forced to evacuate after last year's nuclear power plant accident.

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, is already dealing with the compensation issues based on guidelines created by a government committee of experts. But payments have been delayed because of wide differences in claims between the residents and the utility.

The new guidelines have been compiled by the industry ministry, which oversees the utility. They say that people who evacuated after the nuclear disaster and cannot return home for 6 or more years should be compensated for the full value of their houses.

The guidelines set out a procedure for older houses, which usually would not carry an appraisal amount. They recommend assessing for at least 20 percent of their value at the time they were built.

The industry paper also says that people who lost their jobs or businesses because they evacuated should receive lump sum payments, depending on their line of work.

Tokyo Electric Power says it will present a new compensation standard of its own next week in line with the industry ministry's guidelines.

Moving for good?

July 22, 2012

Nuclear crisis grip on hometown has Fukushima family contemplating moving away for good

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120722p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Sixteen months after the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Koji Yamada is coming to terms with the fact that he and his family will likely never return to the prefectural town of Namie, and is entertaining thoughts of moving away for good.

"I think it's impossible for us to go back to our hometown," said the 72-year-old Yamada, a former Namie municipal employee who evacuated to the Kanagawa Prefecture town of Matsuda.

Yamada built his home in Namie, the town where he was born and raised, 40 years ago when he married his wife, Toyoko, now 73. When his son Yoshiaki, 41, married Mayumi, 37, seven years ago, he spent 20 million yen to renovate the house so that they could live together. The family soon expanded to include two granddaughters: Nagi, 6, and Nanami, 3. Koi swam in a pond in the garden, and there was room for the sisters to run around.

But the Yamadas' home is located within 20 kilometers of the stricken nuclear power plant. It fell within the government's no-go zone after March 11, 2011, completely changing the happy lives of the Yamada family.

That July, Mayumi and Yoshiaki donned protective suits and masks to make a temporary visit to their home for the first time in four months.

"Koi remains were strewn about the dried-up pond, and weeds were overrunning the yard," Mayumi recalled. "The dosimeter showed radiation levels of 9 microsieverts per hour."

The house itself had not suffered any major damage, and the surroundings were as green and lush as ever. But 9 microsieverts of radiation per hour equates to 78 millisieverts of radiation per year, far exceeding the maximum limit of 1 millisievert per year set for the general public.

Upon their return to Matsuda, Mayumi and Yoshiaki told Koji and Toyoko what they'd seen, what they'd felt. Mayumi said that radiation levels in Namie were worse than she'd thought, expressing fears about going back. Yoshiaki agreed.

"Prefectural and town officials say they'll 'try hard so that everyone can return,' but with things the way they are ..." Yoshiaki's voice trailed off.

Koji had been hoping to go home as soon as possible, but had no choice but to accept the input of his son and daughter-in-law. Plus, he, too, had heard that many other Namie evacuees were saying the town was no longer inhabitable.

Since that visit last July, members of the Yamada family took four trips to their home by June this year. Every time, radiation levels measured around 8 to 9 microsieverts.

Money has been another concern for the family. From Koji's approximately 160,000-yen monthly mutual aid pension and Yoshiaki's monthly salary of about 250,000 yen, the family sets aside 130,000 yen for retirement and the two young girls every month; the rest goes to household expenses. The family's income has not dropped dramatically since the onset of the nuclear crisis, and they've received 7.91 million yen in compensation thus far from Fukushima No. 1 plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO). But the Yamada family still doesn't know what kind of compensation they'll receive for their home in Namie, and feel that money is tighter compared to pre-disaster times.

Take, for example, gas. Yoshiaki's company relocated from Namie to the Chiba prefectural town of Tako, where Yoshiaki lives in an apartment during the week. On the weekends, he travels three hours one-way by car to be with his family in Matsuda. Koji, too, sometimes travels to the city of Fukushima to visit friends who have evacuated there. The two-car family spent 20,000 yen a month on gas prior to the nuclear disaster. Now they spend 60,000 yen.

Food, too, is now a different matter. Back in Namie, relatives provided the family with rice and fish. As for vegetables, the Yamadas grew their own on a plot of land nearby. Plus, there was a bounty of food to be found in the wilderness.

"In the spring, there were wild mountain vegetables, and in the fall, mushrooms," Mayumi said. "They were delicious."

Permanent relocation emerged as an option for the Yamada family after media reports on the reorganization of evacuation zones in municipalities other than Namie became increasingly common. Plus, according to current policy, the rent-free apartment the family is living in now -- free because of its temporary housing designation -- will only be available to them until next spring.

A consideration of these factors led Koji to suggest that the family relocate to the Chiba Prefecture town where Yoshiaki works. In fact, the Yamadas are not the only ones leaning toward relocation. According to a survey conducted by the Namie Municipal Government in November 2011, over 30 percent of Namie residents who responded said they wouldn't return to the town.

Naturally, the Yamada family feels attached to Namie. But for the sake of Nanami's and Nagi's health, their parents and grandparents are giving up on their hopes of moving back.

"If we could go back, we would," Mayumi said, her eyes wet. "But Fukushima is no longer the place it used to be."

"I was looking forward to spending my twilight years in Namie, with my family. The sadness of not being able to return to my hometown won't go away. Sometimes, it keeps me awake at night," Toyoko said, Koji nodding in agreement.

Control and flexibility need to be improved

July 23, 2012

Nuclear accident report calls for better administrative system after patients' deaths



Futaba Hospital director Ichiro Suzuki stands transfixed inside the institution, which was left in disarray following evacuations in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on July 11, 2012. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120723p2a00m0na028000c.html>

A government panel investigating the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has criticized a lack of communication between authorities that resulted in evacuation delays and insufficient medical treatment for patients at a Fukushima Prefecture hospital, ultimately leading to many patients' deaths.

Commenting on the deaths of patients from Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, a final report on the nuclear disaster by the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Independent Investigation Commission cited the need for an administrative system providing better control and flexibility.

"Administrative bodies need a mechanism enabling them to govern the whole situation and make adjustments," the report said.

The report noted that 340 patients were hospitalized at Futaba Hospital, which is located about four kilometers southwest of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, when the nuclear disaster broke out at the plant. On March 12 last year, the day after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that sparked the nuclear crisis, 209 patients and all hospital staff except for hospital director Ichiro Suzuki were evacuated in buses provided by the Okuma town government.

Suzuki called on the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and police to rescue the remaining 130 or so patients, but four patients died and one went missing before any help arrived.

On the morning of March 14, 2011, the SDF evacuated 34 patients and 98 people at a neighboring rest home. All the remaining patients were rescued between 9 a.m. on March 15 and 12:30 a.m. on March 16.

However, patients who were evacuated to Iwaki Koyo High School in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki were unable to receive sufficient medical care. According to Futaba Hospital, 40 patients had died by the end of that month, along with another 10 people from the rest home.

"At first we were relieved to have evacuated the patients, but then saw them dying. It was a hopeless situation and seemed like the end of the world," said a Futaba Hospital doctor who treated patients at the time.

At least one other hospital within a 20 kilometer radius of the crippled nuclear plant finished evacuating its patients on March 12, 2011. On this point, the report stated: "The rescue of patients at Futaba Hospital was greatly delayed, and their evacuation to a high school gymnasium can only be judged inappropriate." The cause of this situation, the report said, was that "the department in charge of evacuations was spread over several teams and there was no sharing" of information within the prefectural government headquarters.

Meanwhile, the prefectural government, using information from the SDF, announced at 4 p.m. on March 17, 2011, that patients had been rescued between March 14 and 16, but no hospital staff were present at the time. Suzuki was subsequently criticized for abandoning the patients. In fact, however, he had been led

to safety by a police officer following a evacuation order from police headquarters, and stayed only temporarily in Wariyama Pass in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Kawauchi.

"The prefecture's announcement didn't reflect the actual situation," the accident investigation panel report said. "It was inaccurate and inappropriate, giving the impression that from the 14th onwards, hospital staff members were not present for the rescue, and that they abandoned the patients."

Fukushima octopuses guaranteed without contamination

July 24, 2012

Fukushima octopuses back on the market

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120724a1.html>

SENDAI — Octopuses caught off northern Fukushima Prefecture were auctioned Monday at the Sendai City Central Wholesale Market, marking the first time since the nuclear disaster erupted in March 2011 that seafood from the area has been marketed outside it.

Back on the block: Retailers signal their bids for boiled octopuses from Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, at the Sendai City Central Wholesale Market Monday morning. KYODO



Last month, fishermen in Soma started test marketing their catches within Fukushima. Monday's auction of 250 kg of octopus and shellfish caught off the port fetched bids 10 percent higher than average, a gesture to congratulate the return of seafood from the prefecture.

The octopuses all carried certifications issued by the Fukushima Prefectural Fishermen's Association that declared them free of radioactive contamination.

Soma fishermen had stopped going after local catches after the March 11, 2011, disasters struck. They tentatively resumed harvesting octopuses and shellfish 16 months later.

"The octopuses from Soma are sweet and tasty. Products from Fukushima are finally back on the market, and we're going to do our best to sell them as part of the reconstruction effort," said Takashi Suzuki, one of the Sendai retailers who attended the bidding.

Low attendance in some Fukushima schools

July 24, 2012

Fukushima kids absent as schools to reopen

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120724_13.html

A town in Fukushima Prefecture is **expecting only 18 percent of children to return to local schools when they reopen for the first time since last year's nuclear accident.**

The town of Hirono is located 20 to 25 kilometers from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Most residents evacuated after the March 11th disaster.

Town authorities began calling for their return after an evacuation advisory was lifted last September.

Elementary and junior high schools are due to reopen in late August. The town's Board of Education says 517 children attended the schools before the nuclear accident.

But the Board's recent survey showed that parents of just 95 kids -- or about 18 percent -- were willing to send their children back to the town's schools.

The survey also showed that about 70 percent of the returning children are due to commute from evacuation sites outside the town, due partly to radiation concerns.

Low attendance is also reported at other schools that have reopened in former evacuation zones in Fukushima.

Fukushima schools

TEPCO always turned a deaf ear to people's worries about safety

July 24, 2012

Release of final gov't report on Fukushima disaster sparks residents' criticism

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120724p2a00m0na013000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The release of the government's final investigative report on the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plant that highlights missteps by the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the central government and other authorities in handling the crisis, has triggered residents here to voice their criticism and demand apologies from both TEPCO and the government.

"Local residents were concerned about faults in the safety measures and ways of handling emergency issues (at the Fukushima plant), which (the government report) pointed out, for years before the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. But TEPCO turned a deaf ear, assuring us that no accident could possibly occur," said Mikako Takahashi, 64, who runs a cleaning company in the Fukushima prefectural city of Minamisoma.

"Both the central government and TEPCO need to find a way to restore people's trust," said Takahashi, who took part in post-nuclear disaster planning for the reconstruction of Minamisoma.

A 71-year-old part-time farmer from the town of Tomioka, who is now taking shelter at a temporary housing unit in Koriyama, also criticized both TEPCO and the government for their inefficient roles in handling the crisis.

"I want TEPCO and the government to apologize to residents for failing to cooperate (with other authorities before and during the crisis)," the man quietly said. "I've partially given up on the idea of eventually returning to Tomioka. All I have now is regret that the nuclear power plant was constructed in our residential area."

"All we are occupied with is working toward the reconstruction of our hometown," said Yukie Matsumoto, the mayor of the Fukushima prefectural town of Naraha. "I wish that the government would place its focus of attention on supporting this."

Meanwhile, a key point stressed in the final report, which was released on July 23 by a government panel investigating the ongoing nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, was that

communication between the Fukushima Prefectural Government's disaster response department, the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and police was "inefficient" at the time of the nuclear disaster.

The report also specifically pointed out that the lack of communication between authorities led to an "inappropriate" handling of patient evacuation from hospitals located within 20 kilometers of the damaged nuclear power plant.

In response to the report, Takao Suganuma, the head of the Fukushima Prefectural Government's health and welfare section, which is in charge of providing emergency relief at times of natural calamities, as well as securing evacuation shelters among other duties, called the government's criticism "extremely harsh," and added that "it is being taken seriously."

Commenting on the deaths of 40 patients at the Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, from the time of evacuation until the end of March last year, Suganuma said: "We learned that it is not enough to only evacuate people, but that it is also very important to be aware of each person's condition."

"We are considering revising our ways of handling the situation in cases of natural disasters, including securing communication means between authorities, and other related issues," Suganuma added.

TEPCO to start paying compensation

July 25, 2012

Compensation to cover psychological distress, unemployment

Tepco sets date to start accepting victims' claims

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120725x2.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. will begin accepting claims in September for lump-sum compensation for psychological distress, unemployment and damage to nonfarm businesses caused by the meltdowns at its power plant in Fukushima Prefecture, the utility said.

The announcement made Tuesday follows the government's release last week of detailed compensation standards.

Tepco will pay ¥100,000 per month to each victim for psychological suffering.

Five years' worth of compensation, or ¥6 million, will be paid to victims in the most contaminated of the three new evacuation zones around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, where residents are barred from returning for at least five years.

Residents from the less-contaminated zone, which is likely to be off limits for two years, will get ¥2.4 million each, while those from the least polluted zone, where radiation doses have fallen far enough for residents to return in the near future, will get ¥1.2 million.

The company will also pay lump-sum unemployment compensation for the period through February 2014 and compensation for businesses, excluding farms, through February 2015.

Tepco will begin accepting applications from residents for compensation to cover housing repairs Tuesday.

The utility will announce details of compensation for damage to land, buildings and household goods later.

Officials said the firm hopes to be ready by October to accept such claims, which take longer to estimate.

Victims can choose to receive compensation in a lump sum or in installments. Payments are expected to start about three weeks after the claims are submitted.

Tepco limits home repair compensation to ¥14,000 per sq. meter and ¥10 million per home.

The value of residential land in the new zones is calculated by multiplying the value assessed in fiscal 2010 for taxation purposes by 1.43.

Home values are also determined based mainly on tax assessments. But victims can also use other methods, such as the use of average prices for new homes.

Homes and land in the most contaminated zone will be fully compensated for at precrisis value by Tepco. In principle, compensation will be halved for the less contaminated zone, and cut to one-third for the least polluted zone.

For furniture and other household goods, basic compensation is set at ¥4.75 million for a family of two or larger in the most contaminated zone. To this, Tepco will add ¥600,000 per adult and ¥400,000 per child.

In the other two zones, basic compensation is set at ¥3.55 million with an additional payment of ¥450,000 per adult and ¥300,000 per child.

Tepco will pay ¥300,000 to each resident of the area previously designated as a possible evacuation zone in the event of a new emergency at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. Home repair compensation is also set at ¥300,000. The government lifted the order to prepare for possible evacuation in this area last September.

Criminal complaints against officials accepted

Prosecutors to accept nuclear accident complaints

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120725_09.html

Prosecutors in Japan have reportedly decided to accept criminal complaints against the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company over the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Sources say the prosecutors made the decision after a government-appointed panel of experts released its final report on the accident on Monday.

About 1,300 people asked prosecutors in Fukushima Prefecture last month to investigate officials who held top positions with the government and the nuclear plant operator. The plaintiffs accuse the officials of professional negligence.

Other groups have filed similar complaints in Tokyo and elsewhere.

The prosecutors have to identify the cause of the accident if they decide to file charges against the officials.

The government panel and 3 other committees that conducted probes were unable to find the cause.

Medical experts say it would be difficult to determine that radioactive materials released from the damaged nuclear plant have inflicted physical harm on residents of Fukushima and other parts of Japan.

No need to save any more

Gov't to ease power-saving targets as early as Thursday

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120725p2g00m0dm023000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government has decided to ease power-saving targets imposed on the service areas of four utilities as early as Thursday after the No. 4 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant begins full-capacity power generation, government sources said Tuesday.

For the western Japan service area of Kansai Electric, where electricity supply is expected to be especially tight, the government plans to retain its 10 percent power-saving target, compared with the summer of 2010.

But it is arranging to make an exception in Kansai Electric's service area by lowering the target to around 5 percent for companies, which are feeling a large impact on their production activities from the usage restrictions.

Full operation of the Oi plant's No. 4 reactor is expected to ease power supply constraints in central and western Japan. The government will remove 4 percent power-saving targets for the service areas of Chubu Electric Power Co. and Hokuriku Electric Power Co., as well as the 3 percent target for Chugoku Electric Power Co.'s service area, the sources said.

The three power companies are providing part of their electricity output to Kansai Electric to ease the supply crunch in its service area.

The government is also expected to ease the 7 percent target set for Shikoku Electric's service area to 5 percent.

The government is expected to make a final decision on lowering the targets after confirming the No. 4 reactor has resumed full-capacity operation, scheduled for early Wednesday.

It will be the second reactor to resume full operation, following the Oi plant's No. 3 reactor, after all of Japan's commercial reactors were suspended for regular checks and other reasons in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The government plans to retain power-saving targets of 10 percent and 7 percent for southwestern and northern areas covered by Kyushu Electric Power Co. and Hokkaido Electric Power Co., respectively, due to tight electricity supply conditions there. No numerical saving targets were set for areas supplied by Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Since the government-requested power-saving period began on July 2, electricity supply and demand conditions have been stable given relatively low temperatures in Japan.

But utilities' electricity supply operations have been temporarily disrupted by glitches and for other reasons at some thermal power plants and temperatures are expected to rise, raising the likelihood of increased power usage for air conditioning.

8.46% increase for households

TEPCO to raise household electricity rates 8.46% from Sept.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120725p2g00m0dm069000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government approved Wednesday a request from Tokyo Electric Power Co. to raise household electricity rates by an average 8.46 percent from Sept. 1 to help the utility overcome its financial plight following last year's nuclear disaster at its Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The permission will pave the way for the country's largest utility known as TEPCO to receive a public fund injection of 1 trillion yen Tuesday, meaning it will effectively be placed under state control.

Stressing that the government strictly checked the appropriateness of the costs to be passed on to consumers, energy agency chief Ichiro Takahara urged TEPCO President Naomi Hirose to continue to fulfill its key tasks such as paying massive disaster-related compensation and providing stable electricity supply to its service area including Tokyo.

It is the first time in 32 years that TEPCO has resorted to such a rate hike that requires government permission.

In May, TEPCO applied to the government to raise household electricity rates by an average 10.28 percent from July 1, citing increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the suspension of nuclear power generation following the Fukushima crisis triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

But it was forced to trim its request to 8.46 percent as the government called on the utility to revise the hike to about 8.47 percent such as by slashing personnel and other costs the company had planned to pass on to consumers.

Hirose told Takahara, director general of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency, he hopes to take the initiative to encourage company employees to maintain their motivation to stably supply power despite cut in labor costs.

As the government screening process on the utility's rate hike plan has been prolonged, TEPCO said earlier in the day it now plans to receive the capital injection next Tuesday, postponing the payment schedule by about a week.

While winning government approval for the rate hike is an apparent relief to the cash-strapped company, Hirose expressed concern last week over how its business may be adversely affected by not being allowed to raise charges as initially sought.

Under its 10-year comprehensive restructuring plan, the utility is forecast to start logging a net profit in the business year ending in March 2014.

The plan, however, largely relies on whether TEPCO can increase revenues by raising electricity prices and restart its idled nuclear reactors in Niigata Prefecture from next April, an apparently daunting task amid heightened public concerns over the safety of nuclear power.

After the utility receives the 1 trillion yen of taxpayers' money on Tuesday, financial institutions are expected to provide 370 billion yen in additional loans the following day.

Power supply and demand "still on a tightrope"

July 26, 2012

KEPCO relying on firms for power saving

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120725005146.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Conservation efforts by firms in KEPCO service area

	Power-saving plans		Summer 2012 (as of July 23)	Summer 2011
Large-lot users	Peak-time adjustment contract	No. of contracts	3,500	1,700
		Electricity saved (kW)	1,710,000	1,000,000
	On-demand adjustment contract	No. of contracts	173	28
		Electricity saved (kW)	430,000	380,000
Small-lot users	Demand restraint contract	No. of contracts	78,300	61,000

Despite the restart of Oi nuclear power plant's No. 4 reactor at full operating capacity, Kansai Electric Power Co. is unable to secure a power reserve of 3 percent of its total supply capacity--the minimum required in its service area.

Foreseeing this situation, the government and KEPCO decided to maintain a power-saving target of keeping consumption more than 10 percent below the amount consumed in the summer of 2010.

However, as hospitals and manufacturing facilities were seen to be heavily affected by the power-saving measures, the utility decided to reduce the target for them to about 5 percent.

To avoid planned blackouts this summer, KEPCO made contracts with many companies aimed at saving the equivalent of 20 percent of the maximum power demand by large-lot users in the summer of 2010.

Through such measures, the amount of electricity saved by companies this summer is expected to exceed 7 percent, a rate achieved last summer.

However, even with such efforts, the power supply and demand situation remains on a tightrope.

KEPCO depends on thermal power generation for about 50 percent of its supply capacity. But in fiscal 2011 there were 93 incidents in which its thermal power plants were halted, mainly due to malfunctions. If such troubles continue, KEPCO may be forced to impose rolling blackouts.

Under its power-saving plan, KEPCO offers a "peak-time adjustment contract" for large-lot customers, including large factories. Under this plan, large-lot consumers receive a discount for saving electricity during peak-demand hours in the afternoon.

According to the utility, half of its 7,000 large-lot consumers agreed to sign the deal. In Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s service area, about 4,300 of its about 13,000 users made similar contracts.

KEPCO also offers an "on-demand power-saving contract," in which large-lot users receive discounts for reducing electricity consumption according to requests by the utility when the power supply-demand balance gets tight.

Compared to last summer, 145 more large-lot consumers concluded the contracts this summer.

As of Monday, 2.14 million kilowatts of electricity had been saved under the two plans, equivalent to nearly 20 percent of the maximum demand by large-lot users in the summer of 2010.

However, one analyst expressed caution over a power-saving framework that depends heavily on firms.

"Energy-saving measures will weigh heavily on companies, likely prompting many of them to shift their capital investment to areas outside the Kansai region," said Shigeo Hirose of Japan Research Institute, Ltd.

TEPCO & compensation

TEPCO may start lump-sum compensation in August

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120725005729.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

TEPCO's model cases on compensation for damages due to the crisis at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant

	Zones where residency is prohibited for extended periods	Zones with restricted residency	Zones being prepared for residents' return
Housing lots	¥4.29 mil.	¥2.15 mil.	¥1.43 mil.
Buildings	¥22.82 mil.	¥11.41 mil.	¥7.61 mil.
Household goods	¥6.35 mil.	¥4.75 mil.	¥4.75 mil.
Psychological damage	¥18 mil.	¥7.2 mil.	¥3.6 mil.
Lost work income	¥5.67 mil.	¥5.67 mil.	¥5.67 mil.
Total	¥57.13 mil.	¥31.18 mil.	¥23.06 mil.

**"Housing lot" is a 300-square-meter plot of land with an assessed value of ¥3 million for fixed property tax. "Building" is a 140-square-meter wooden house built in 2007 with an assessed value of ¥8.61 million with the same tax. The calculations are based on a family of two adults and one child. Costs for evacuation and returning home will be paid separately.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has introduced new compensation criteria for victims who own houses or housing lots in areas evacuated due to the crisis at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and announced some compensation payments will be paid as early as late August.

TEPCO has already begun payments for psychological damage and job losses. These payments will be combined with those for real estate properties, such as housing lots and buildings.

The utility will make lump-sum compensation payments in affected areas to help victims make a swift return to their normal daily lives.

TEPCO's new compensation criteria, which were announced Tuesday, are based on the government's compensation policy announced last Friday for damaged real estate and other assets in evacuated areas.

Up until now, TEPCO has asked victims to apply for compensation every three months in principle. However, the utility revised the practice due to government rezoning of the affected areas near the Fukushima plant.

The new zoning system, which was first implemented in April, divides the affected areas into three categories based on their annual radiation exposure levels. The three categories are: zones where residency will be prohibited for at least five years (annual radiation exposure exceeds 50 millisieverts); zones where residency will be restricted for several years (20 millisieverts to 50 millisieverts per year); and zones being prepared for residents' return following decontamination work (less than 20 millisieverts per year).

Under the new zoning system, there are certain periods of time in which residents cannot return home. With that in mind, the new compensation criteria for lump-sum payments will be based on the length of the period before residents are able to return home.

The new criteria is expected to cover about 160,000 people from 60,000 households.

Victims who lived in prohibited residency zones will receive full compensation for their housing lots. The amount to be paid will be determined based on the assessed value for fixed property tax before the nuclear crisis occurred.

In principle, TEPCO will also provide full compensation for buildings after deducting damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Payments will be calculated based on the building's assessed value for fixed property tax at the time of the crisis.

The utility will pay at least 3.25 million yen in damages to household goods such as furniture. However, the amount to be paid will differ depending on the makeup of each household.

TEPCO will also pay 6 million yen per victim to compensate for psychological damage over a five-year period starting from June this year.

According to a TEPCO estimate, a family consisting of two adults and one child, aged 18 or younger at the time the nuclear crisis started, with a 140-square-meter house valued at 8.61 million yen built in 2007 on a 300-square-meter housing lot valued at 3 million yen in a prohibited residency zone would receive a total of about 57.13 million yen.

In another estimate, a family of three adults and two children may receive a total of 60.21 million yen.

The amount of compensation will differ depending on individual cases, according to TEPCO.

Victims in restricted residency zones and zones being prepared for residents' return will receive less compensation than those in prohibited residency zones as they will be able to return home sooner.

Before beginning compensation payments under the new criteria, TEPCO will pay all victims in all zones 14,000 yen per square meter of floor space to a maximum of 10 million yen to help with housing repairs before residents return. The utility will begin accepting applications for repair costs before the end of the month.

TEPCO did not provide a specific date as to when it would begin accepting applications for compensation payments under the new criteria, only saying it would like to start "two or three months later." The utility explained it would take time to obtain information, such as real estate registrations, that would make the application process easier for victims.

"Bold measures" necessary to promote renewables actively

July 26, 2012

Editorial: Japan needs major shift in energy policy to cut ties to nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120726p2a00m0na003000c.html>

A major shift in the nation's energy policy is needed if Japan is to reduce its reliance on nuclear power. **Not only must the scope of energy conservation be expanded, the nation must promote the introduction of renewable energy.**

Moving in this direction, Japan this month launched a feed-in tariff system under which utilities purchase renewable energy at fixed prices. We hope that this system is utilized to spread the use of renewable energy.

Renewable energy is easy on the environment, and plays a part in the fight against global warming. Though its scale is smaller than that of nuclear power plants, it has the benefit of being able to be utilized during times of disaster through a model of local dispersion.

In fiscal 2010, renewable energy accounted for just 10 percent of Japan's total power generation. Taking hydroelectric power out of the equation, the figure stands at a mere 1 percent. In the past, Japan had focused on promoting nuclear power and had shied away from introducing renewable energy due to its high cost, among other reasons.

Under the new system, power utilities are required to purchase power generated through renewable energy models at fixed prices over extended periods of time -- a setup promoting the use of renewable energy.

The system applies to solar, wind and geothermal power, as well as small- and medium-scale hydroelectric power generation and biomass power. A third-party committee operating under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry suggests prices for each unit of power, and the government makes the final decision. Homes and businesses foot the additional cost through their electricity bills.

At the launch of the system, solar power was priced at 42 yen per kilowatt-hour, while wind power was set between 23.1 and 57.75 yen per kilowatt-hour depending on the scale of power generation -- close to what companies generating electricity had hoped for. Criticism has arisen that these prices are high, but when taking efforts to promote the long-delayed introduction of renewable energy into consideration, this is probably unavoidable. For a regular household consuming 300 kilowatt-hours of electricity a month, the higher cost would convert to a monthly electricity bill increase of around 87 yen.

Under the government's options for a new energy policy to be implemented by 2030, renewable energy is slated to account for 25 to 35 percent of total electricity generation. But it is doubtful that such figures can be achieved without bold measures.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy predicts that during the current fiscal year, electricity generation under the new system will top 2.5 million kilowatts -- roughly the equivalent of the amount produced by 2 1/2 nuclear power plants. The estimate is a sign that the system is kicking in.

At the same time, if renewable energy is progressively introduced, then the burden on consumers will increase. If the burden is excessive, then the very existence of the system could be threatened. In Germany, another developed country where the feed-in tariff system has been implemented, an excessive burden on the public sparked a review of the system.

In Japan, the prices of renewable energy are to be reviewed every year, but for electricity generators, the price and the term set during the fiscal year in which approval was given will be guaranteed.

Allowances probably need to be made for reviews of the pricing system when technological development and other advances enable companies to cut costs. A flexible approach enabling the government to support technological development is also probably needed. We want the government to keep its eyes open on all fronts for chances to spread renewable energy, while taking the situation in other developed countries into consideration.

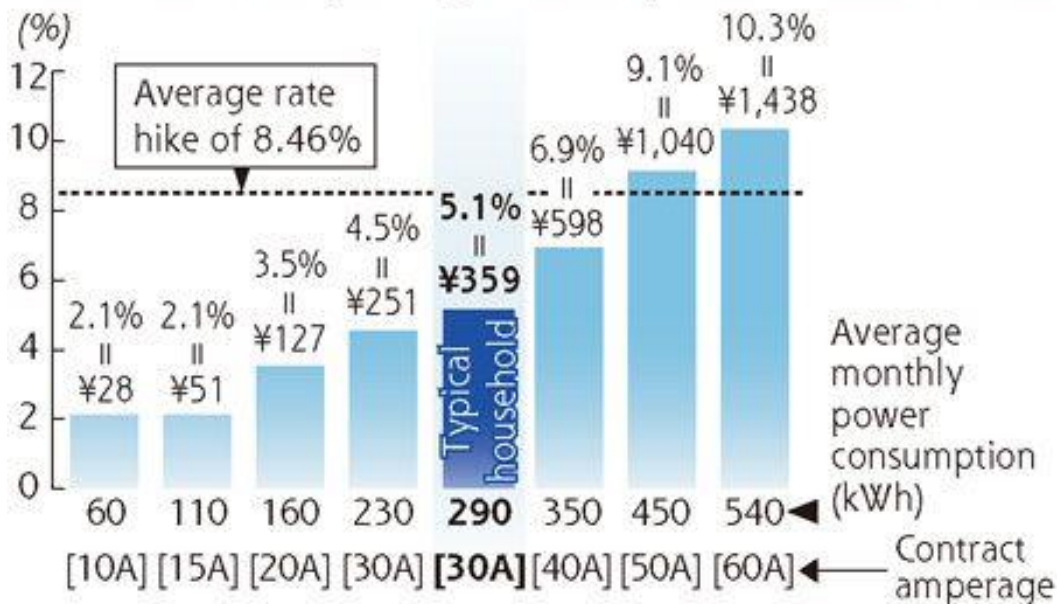
More than 10%?

July 27, 2012

Rate hike to burden families / TEPCO's rate to increase by more than 10% for some families

Chiaki Toyoda and Tadaaki Inoue / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

Contract amperage and power rate hike



Households will experience a variety of increases in their electricity rates when Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s government-approved electricity rate hike takes effect.

Under the hike, approved by the government Wednesday, households will be charged higher rates as they consume more electricity.

Households serviced by TEPCO have no choice but to accept the latest hike because they cannot choose the power firm that supplies their home with electricity. This is likely to prompt calls for the utility to take measures to reduce the burden of rate hikes on households in the future.

Under the new scheme, which takes effect Sept. 1, rates will go up by an average of 8.46 percent. However, households with higher levels of electricity consumption will experience a steeper hike in their monthly bills.

For example, customers that use 120 kilowatt-hours of electricity or less per month will have their rates increase by 2.6 percent. The increase will be 7.6 percent for households that use between 121 kilowatt-hours and 300 kilowatt-hours. A steeper hike of 17.9 percent will be experienced by households that consume more than 301 kilowatt-hours.

Therefore, TEPCO's estimates on actual electricity rates, which are a basic charge (which TEPCO calls a demand charge) plus other charges, show different rate hikes depending on the household.

For example, a household with a 60-ampere contract that uses 540 kilowatt-hours per month will face a hike of 10.3 percent, or 1,438 yen, in its monthly charge. A household on a 20-ampere contract that uses 160 kilowatt-hours will experience an increase of 3.5 percent, or 127 yen.

Ichiro Takahara, director general of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency, approved the planned rate hike on Wednesday during a meeting with TEPCO President Naomi Hirose. At the meeting, Takahara urged Hirose to introduce measures to reduce the burden on consumers. "[Consumers] cannot choose power firms, and you should seriously consider their situation," Takahara said.

In June, TEPCO introduced a new scheme called the "Peak Shift Plan," under which higher rates are set for peak hours (1 p.m. to 4 p.m. from July to September) and lower rates are set during the night. As the new plan was thought to be more cost-efficient for households with high energy consumption, TEPCO expected up to 150,000 contracts by August. However, only 600 households had signed up for the new plan as of Tuesday, because many ratepayers are concerned about the high rates during peak hours.

TEPCO has also introduced other schemes that have discount rates at night and higher rates during the day. However, only a small number of households are likely to benefit from the schemes.

The smaller the size of the contract amperage, the cheaper the demand charge is. "To lower electricity rates, consumers should cut their electricity consumption or to reduce the demand charge by lowering their contract amperage," a senior official at the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry said.

"We'll seriously consider ideas [to reduce burdens on households]," Hirose said at a press conference Wednesday.

TEPCO increased electricity rates for large-lot ratepayers in April. Combined with September's household rate hike, TEPCO forecasts its revenue to grow by about 400 billion yen.

However, some large-lot ratepayers are refusing to pay the increased fees as they are opposed to the hikes.

Among the 139,000 large-lot ratepayers whose contract expired between April and June, 12,000 ratepayers have not agreed to the hikes. TEPCO has been providing them with electricity but has not renewed their contracts.

Another 96,000 contracts will expire from July to March next year, with 20,000 of the ratepayers not agreeing to the hikes.

Unless it resolves this situation, TEPCO will be unable to obtain the increased revenue it expects.

All is fine...

July 28, 2012

Hong Kong downgrades travel alert for Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120728_10.html

Hong Kong has downgraded its travel advisory for Japan's Fukushima Prefecture to the lowest level.

The Hong Kong government advised against all travel to the prefecture following last year's accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

It adjusted the alert to "monitor the situation, exercise caution" on Friday.

But the government is still advising residents to pay attention to announcements by Japanese authorities.

It is also calling on people to avoid all travel within 20 kilometers of the Daiichi plant as well as to evacuation areas designated by the Japanese government.

Hong Kong residents rank high on the list of foreign visitors to Japan.

But the number of visitors from Hong Kong dropped last year by about 30 percent year-on-year to about 360,000 following the disaster in northeast Japan.

Downgrading of the advisory is expected to help increase the number of visitors from Hong Kong.

South Korea and Taiwan have lifted their travel restrictions to Japan except for parts of Fukushima Prefecture.

China has yet to lift its advisory against travel to Fukushima Prefecture and other areas hit hard by the disaster.

"Decontaminated" horses are back in Fukushima

July 29, 2012

Horse chase festival reinstated in Fukushima after decontamination

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120729a4.html>

FUKUSHIMA — The Soma wild horse chase festival, a tradition dating back more than 1,000 years, resumed Saturday close to its usual size after being scaled down last year in the wake of the natural and nuclear disasters.

Back in the saddle: Riders take part in the Soma Nomaoui wild horse festival Saturday in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. KYODO



The three-day Soma Nomaoi event in Fukushima Prefecture re-creates the act of warriors honing their battleground skills by chasing unleashed wild horses cast as the enemy.

Last year, areas used in the event were turned into no-go zones due to the nuclear crisis, reducing the horse count to 82. **Thanks to decontamination work and a redrawing of the hot zones, about 400 horses are expected this year, bringing the herd size back up to roughly 80 percent.**

Inaugural ceremonies were held at three shrines, including Soma Nakamura Shrine in the city of Soma. Local Mayor Hidekiyo Tachiya, who also serves as 'chief general' at the festival, commanded his troops to "march majestically."

Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai, who heads the organizing committee for the event, said, "We would like to pray for the repose of the souls of those who perished and express our gratitude for having been able to stage this festival as a symbol of reconstruction."

Kids get Italian vacation

Kyodo

CAGLIARI, Italy — Twelve children from Fukushima Prefecture have arrived in Cagliari, Italy, for a summer vacation at the invitation of a nonprofit group based in Milan.

The children, six boys and six girls aged between 7 and 12, landed on the island of Sardinia Friday and will stay through Aug. 25. They will take part in vegetable farming, horse riding and exchanges with local children.

"I want to take care of animals and swim in the sea," a 9-year-old boy from Shirakawa said upon arriving at the airport. A 10-year-old girl from Date said, "I'm looking forward to cooking vegetables."

The Orto dei Sogni NPO, which was established last October by Japanese and Italians living in Milan to support children affected by the March 2011 quake and tsunami, collected contributions in the city to fund the visit.

Fukushima octopuses for sale

August 2, 2012

First seafood shipment from Fukushima Pref. made to Tsukiji market since nuke disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120802p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Octopus shipments taken off of Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, arrived at Tsukiji market in Tokyo on the morning of Aug. 2, the first shipment of marine products from Fukushima Prefecture to the Kanto region since the nuclear disaster.

The octopuses were caught in test fishing by the Fukushima prefectural fishing association in preparation for a full-scale resumption to fishing there.

Tohto Suisan, a company that stocked 50 kilograms of the octopus, sold it to gathered wholesalers who checked the radiation-inspection certificates and examined the quality of the octopus.

Toru Onozuka, 60, who bought some of the octopus at 20 percent over its market price, said, "Octopus from Soma is firm and good quality. There's inspection results indicating it is safe, so there is no problem."

Tohto Suisan's octopus sold out in the morning. Toshiyuki Ishihara, 57, who was in charge of selling, said, "Fukushima was an important business partner since before the earthquake disaster. If we can start the steady stocking of its products, we expect that customers will return."

First octopuses shipped from off Fukushima traded

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120802_17.html

Octopuses caught in the sea off of Fukushima Prefecture were traded for the first time in 17 months after the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident in March last year.

On Thursday dawn, about 110 kilograms of Giant Pacific Octopuses were traded at Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market.

The octopuses were caught off Soma City in Fukushima Prefecture, about 50 kilometers northeast from the crippled nuclear power plant. They were shipped to Tokyo and Nagoya for the first time since the nuclear accident.

The fishing was conducted on a trial basis. All catches were cleared for radiation contamination tests before shipment.

Wholesalers checked the test results and freshness during bidding.

A wholesaler said he bought the octopuses at a price about 20 percent higher than before the accident. He said he wanted to show his support for reconstruction efforts in Fukushima Prefecture.

The octopuses will be sold at stores around Tokyo. A fishermen's association in Fukushima Prefecture will discuss whether to resume fishing after the sales results.

Prosecutors to examine responsibility of gov't and TEPCO

August 2, 2012

Prosecutors open criminal probes over Fukushima meltdown disaster

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120802a2.html>

Prosecutors opened converging criminal probes Wednesday into the March 2011 triple-meltdown disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, looking to hold people in positions of power accountable, including then Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office and two other district prosecutor's offices acted in response to five criminal complaints, including accusations that Tepco executives and government officials committed acts of professional negligence that resulted in deaths, injuries and exposure to high levels of radiation that could have been avoided, sources said.

The other investigative tacks were initiated by the Fukushima District Public Prosecutor's Office and the Kanazawa District Public Prosecutor's Office in Ishikawa Prefecture.

The prosecutors waited until a government investigative panel released its final report on the crisis on July 23 to avoid influencing the results. But the prosecutors may face a number of difficulties in establishing their cases, the sources said.

The Tokyo prosecutors accepted three criminal complaints, including one that accuses 26 senior officials of Tepco and the education ministry of actions that resulted in the deaths of hospital patients near the plant and the unnecessary exposure of residents to radiation.

The number of victims was not specified. It is believed some bedridden hospital patients died from lack of proper treatment in the early days of the radiation evacuation scare when some were allegedly abandoned.

Another complaint accuses six government officials, including Kan, of failing to act quickly to ensure that radioactive steam was vented from the containment vessel of the plant's reactor 1, leading to hydrogen explosions that injured plant workers.

The Fukushima prosecutors accepted a complaint in which some 1,300 prefectural residents accuse 33 people, including former Tepco Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and Haruki Madarame, chairman of the government's Nuclear Safety Commission, of negligence in connection with the disaster, which another, Diet-appointed independent panel concluded was effectively "man-made," particularly because the power plant lacked the quake and tsunami defenses that historical evidence indicated it required.

Prosecutors accept criminal complaint from Fukushima residents against TEPCO execs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120802p2a00m0na011000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Prosecutors here have accepted a criminal complaint that Fukushima Prefecture residents filed against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) executives and atomic power experts over the nuclear crisis.

Approximately 1,300 residents of the prefecture accuse TEPCO executives as well as scholars belonging to the government's Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

According to the complaint, TEPCO executives and NSC experts failed to implement safety measures even though it had been pointed out that a massive tsunami could trigger a serious accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, allowing the crisis to break out and exposing many local residents to radiation.

However, a majority of prosecutors are of the view that it is extremely difficult to indict them citing a lack of evidence. To bring criminal charges against TEPCO executives and NSC scholars, prosecutors must confirm the causal relationship between the crisis and injuries and deaths and find enough evidence to prove that they could have predicted and prevented the accident.

Similar complaints have been filed with district public prosecutors offices in Tokyo and a number of other areas. However, prosecution authorities had withheld the acceptance of them until the government's fact-finding panel on the nuclear crisis released its final report.

The Tokyo and Fukushima district public prosecutors offices are expected to play a key role in the investigation into the case, prosecution sources said.

Prosecutors: criminal inquiry in nuclear accident

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120801_28.html

Japanese Prosecutors will start investigating the Fukushima nuclear accident as a criminal act by the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company.

About 1,300 people asked prosecutors in Fukushima in June to determine the criminal responsibility of government officials and TEPCO executives. Charges might include professional negligence resulting in death or injury.

Groups in Tokyo and Kanazawa filed similar complaints.

Prosecutors in the 3 districts on Wednesday officially accepted the complaints and decided to open the case, coordinating with each other.

In order to press criminal charges, the prosecutors will have to identify the cause of the accident. Government and civil investigative committees have failed to do so.

Medical experts say it will be difficult to determine if radioactive material released from the damaged nuclear plant caused physical harm to residents of Fukushima or other parts of Japan.

Author Takashi Hirose, a plaintiff in the Tokyo group, told reporters on Wednesday that he hopes the probes will make the government and the utility compensate people for their suffering.

Fukushima people call for total abolition of nukes

August 2, 2012

Fukushima residents call for elimination of nuclear plants at hearing on energy policy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120802p2a00m0na015000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- An overwhelming majority of Fukushima Prefecture residents at a hearing on Japan's future energy policy that the government held on Aug. 1 called for the total elimination of nuclear power stations.

Thirty Fukushima prefectural residents, including those taking shelter outside the prefecture, expressed opinions on atomic energy policy, and 28 of them said the ratio of nuclear power to Japan's total electric power generation should be reduced to zero.

The results highlight **a wide perception gap in atomic power policy between the general public and business circles that are calling for continued use of atomic power out of concern about power shortages.** The government has been put in an increasingly difficult position in making future energy policy.

In June this year, the government worked out three scenarios in which the ratio of nuclear power to Japan's total power generation would be zero percent, 15 percent and 20-25 percent as of 2030.

At the Aug. 1 hearing held in Fukushima, the attendees who expressed opinions on Japan's future energy policy described their experiences following the outbreak of the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Many of them then criticized the government's declaration that the Fukushima nuclear crisis had been brought under control and the decision in June to reactivate the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture. "The government's moves are too hasty," one attendee said.

An overwhelming majority of them criticized the government's stance toward Japan's future energy policy, and called for total abolition of nuclear power stations.

"It's outrageous that the government showed the options of the ratio of Japan's reliance on atomic power while the cause of the nuclear disaster hasn't been clarified yet," one of them said.

Many of them urged the government to implement a more drastic measure to shut down all nuclear power stations than its projected scenario to reduce Japan's dependence on atomic power on a step-by-step basis and eventually to zero by 2030. "All nuclear plants should be shut down immediately," one attendee said.

Goshi Hosono, state minister for the restoration from and prevention of nuclear accidents, said the government respects Fukushima residents' opinions but stopped short of mentioning specific energy policy.

"We take Fukushima people's feelings seriously. The government will work seriously on the issue so as not to give the public the impression that the government held the hearing in order to simply demonstrate it got local residents involved in the policy-making process just as a show," he said.

Secret meetings did have an impact

Secret meetings on nuclear fuel cycle influenced subcommittee discussion: report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120802p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Secret meetings of pro-nuclear power experts organized by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) influenced discussion by a subcommittee on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle, a report by a Cabinet Office investigative team has concluded.

The report, which is due to be handed to nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono on Aug. 3, acknowledges that electric power companies at the secret meetings pushed for the adoption of policies in favor of maintaining Japan's nuclear fuel recycle, under which spent nuclear fuel would be reprocessed and used as fuel for nuclear reactors. It concludes that the secret meetings, called "study meetings," served as a **forum for the government and companies to hammer out policies.**

The team's finding contradicts JAEC's stance that the secret meetings did not influence subcommittee discussion on the nuclear fuel cycle.

JAEC set up a subcommittee of experts in September last year to review Japan's nuclear fuel cycle policy in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The subcommittee concluded in June this year that if Japan's level of dependence on nuclear power stood at 15 percent in 2030, then a "concurrent" approach of reprocessing some spent fuel and directly burying other spent fuel underground would be appropriate. The government's Energy and Environment Council is poised to make a decision on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle policy, paying respect to the subcommittee's decision.

The Cabinet Office investigation team questioned about 40 of the 80 or so people who participated in the secret meetings. One of them stated that at a secret meeting on March 8 this year, participants approved a proposal to strike out a scenario on Japan's fast-breeder reactor Monju from discussion by the subcommittee. Under the scenario, Japan's research and development relating to the Monju reactor -- a central part of the nuclear fuel cycle -- would be halted.

The investigation team restored about 6,600 email and data items that a Cabinet Office official who chaired the secret meetings deleted before he stepped down. It found that many participants of the secret meetings had sent emails to JAEC between late April and early May, requesting changes to a draft of the subcommittee's final recommendation.

When the recommendation was still in a draft format, it included expressions favoring direct disposal of all spent nuclear fuel from Japan's nuclear power plants. However, the recommendation that had been revised to favor the concurrent approach of partial reprocessing was submitted to a subcommittee meeting on May 8.

Ahead of the latest report, JAEC acting head Tatsujiro Suzuki, who attended the secret meetings on 21 occasions and presided over the "official" meetings of the subcommittee, had maintained that the secret meetings had not influenced the subcommittee's discussion.

Fukushima carps all right?

August 8, 2012

Fukushima carp breeders strive to regain No. 1 spot

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120807002831.htm>

FUKUSHIMA--Carp breeders in Fukushima Prefecture--once the nation's No. 1 source of cultivated carp--have been struggling since the outbreak of the nuclear crisis last year due to consumers' fears of radiation.

The prefecture led the nation in carp shipments for seven consecutive years from 2004. In the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, however, shipments dropped to 705 tons in 2011, a 35 percent decrease over the previous year and yielding the No. 1 position to Ibaraki Prefecture.

Tests for radioactive substances have confirmed the carp's safety, but many consumers remain anxious. To further promote the safety of their fish, therefore, Fukushima producers have changed how they cultivate carp so the fish will not inhale dirt at the bottom of their pool.

"If our carp don't sell, we'll have to pay more for feed and our business will suffer," said Sumiyuki Kumada, 69, president of fisheries company Kumada Suisan. Kumada's firm is the largest in Koriyama, the center of cultivated carp in Fukushima Prefecture.

Kumada Suisan's shipments dropped by 40 percent in 2011 from the previous year.

Hiroshi Tomizawa, 74, vice chairman of the Ken-nan cultivated carp fisheries cooperative of major eight carp producers, said anxiously, "We can't relieve our clients' anxiety, even by explaining the test results for radioactive substances."

The union has decided to adopt a new cultivation method that prevents carp from swimming near the bottom of cultivation pools where there is dirt, as consumers are nervous about dirt being ingested by carp. The new method floats a net in a pool and lets carp swim only in that net.

It costs several million yen to adopt the new method, which also requires the troublesome supply of oxygen to carp that swim in crowded, narrow spaces.

"We can't sit idly by," Tomizawa said. "We'll aggressively promote the fact that our carp are safe."

Kumada said, "I think making Koriyama's carp No. 1 in Japan again will lead to regaining consumers' confidence in the food produced in Fukushima Prefecture."

Rice testing

Rice tested for radiation in experiment in Fukushima



A JA worker tests rice for radiation at a JA Michinoku Adachi facility in Motomiya, Fukushima Prefecture, on Aug. 7. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120808p2a00m0na017000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- An experiment to test radiation levels in rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture was conducted at an agricultural facility on Aug. 7 ahead of the launch of shipments of rice from the prefecture later in the month.

The test was conducted at a JA Michinoku Adachi facility in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Motomiya, in preparation for checks for radioactive cesium on all bags of rice from the prefecture.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to test all rice produced in the prefecture this year -- a total of about **360,000 tons**. In the experiment, rice produced in 2011 was placed on a conveyor belt, and radiation levels were tested using newly developed equipment.

If the radioactivity of cesium in the rice exceeds 100 becquerels per kilogram, then the rice can't be shipped out. The experiment examined whether radioactivity could be detected in rice with varying concentrations of radioactive cesium.

Commenting on the process, a JA representative said, "We can now distribute safe rice."

Prefectural officials say 143 testing devices will be introduced in the prefecture. Testing is expected to be completed early next year.

Gove't will helpmake up for losses if reliance on nuclear is reduced

August 10, 2012

Nuclear plant locales to get aid, Edano says

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120810a4.html>

Industry minister Yukio Edano has expressed readiness to protect jobs in municipalities that host nuclear power plants when the government reduces the country's reliance on atomic energy.

He recently pointed to the possibility of using the communities as bases for other sources of energy production, given that they already have extensive power grids.

He also called on utilities to thoroughly restructure before applying for electricity rate increases amid the shutdown of most of the nation's nuclear reactors.

"If utilities that are paying a large amount of dividends say they want to raise rates for the dividend payment, I don't think that kind of proposal would gain user acceptance," the economy, trade and industry minister said.

While the government plans to decide soon how quickly to reduce the country's reliance on nuclear power following last year's Fukushima meltdowns, Edano said it would take into consideration, "as a matter of course," the negative impact that changes in energy policy might have on areas hosting nuclear plants.

"If nuclear power plants are decommissioned sooner than expected, we need to take steps to establish alternative businesses" in the municipalities that host them, he said.

"The areas (with nuclear plants) have some advantages, such as having strong power transmission networks," Edano said, noting the need to promote renewable energy, such as solar and wind power.

"So based on that, I think we can implement regional development measures in consultation with local authorities," he said, adding the government may also be able to support construction of highly efficient natural gas thermal power plants in such areas.

While the government is currently assessing public opinion on Japan's future energy mix, Edano said he acknowledges that "on the whole, there are many citizens who want to abolish nuclear power, if possible. . . We need to make a decision based on the voices of many citizens."

To put together the new energy policy, the government is soliciting public opinion while presenting three options for reducing Japan's nuclear energy proportion of total power generation by 2030: zero percent, 15 percent or 20 to 25 percent, compared with 26 percent in fiscal 2010.

Meanwhile, Edano said that even if utilities are required to decommission their reactors earlier than planned under the new policy, costs for the decommissioning should be shouldered by the utilities in principle.

"Basically, they're costs that should be covered by electricity companies," he said, urging utilities to set aside if necessary adequate reserves for possible acceleration of reactor decommissioning.

But as for the decommissioning of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, he said the government needs to consider the matter "comprehensively," implying the possibility of offering public support. He said the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant should be decommissioned to revitalize Fukushima.

Edano said that if utilities ask the government to approve their plan to raise electricity rates, the government will apply the same screening criteria as it used when examining a rate-hike proposal by the utility.

While it's possible some utilities may seek rate hikes to cover increasing thermal fuel costs to make up for the halt of their reactors, Edano said utilities wanting rate increases must have already started cost-cutting in line with criteria calling for a 20 percent cut in personnel costs.

"We would not allow them to say that they would set out to implement (restructuring) when they seek a rate hike," he said.

More claims against TEPCO

August 10, 2012

Families of tsunami dead seek Tepco redress for delayed search

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120810b4.html>

FUKUSHIMA — Relatives of people killed in the March 11, 2011, tsunami filed Thursday for compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co., arguing the nuclear crisis triggered that day delayed the search for their loved ones.

The claim filed by 333 people from the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, with the government's nuclear crisis dispute settlement center in Tokyo demands that the utility pay ¥10 million per claimant.

According to their lawyers, 164 people who lived near the crippled nuclear plant lost their lives on 3/11.

All of victims apparently died within the 20-km no-go zone around the plant after the meltdowns started, the lawyers said.

The relatives claim that search operations were delayed for a month after the nuclear crisis started.

Morihisa Kanoya, the 72-year-old chairman of an association of relatives of the next of kin in Namie, said the families have borne considerable suffering and sadness and are now finally able to take the first step toward compensation.

Ban lifted but uncertainty about safety remains

August 10, 2012

Entry ban lifted in a town in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120810_23.html

The Japanese government has lifted its entry ban on part of a town in Fukushima Prefecture that had high levels of radiation caused by the nuclear accident last year. But some residents are protesting the move.

Residents in that area of the town of Naraha started returning home on Friday after the ban was lifted at midnight.

The government has reclassified the area as having sufficiently low levels of radiation to support residents returning as soon as possible. Now they can come and go freely but are not allowed to stay overnight.

A shopkeeper who went home opened the windows of his house and placed fresh flowers at the Buddhist family altar.

Those opposed to lifting the ban protested the move at the border of the former no-entry zone.

The protestors held up signs to drivers asking if Naraha could guarantee a safe future for its children.

They say the area's safety is uncertain as health concerns remain. They also say shortening the evacuation period could mean less compensation from the nuclear plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

One outsider in the gov't rezoning of no-go zones

August 11, 2012

All but one nuke crisis no-go zone municipalities join gov't re-designation plan

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120810p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Of the 11 Fukushima Prefecture municipalities subject to government no-entry designation in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, new zones are expected to go into effect in all but the prefectural town of Futaba.

Since this past April, the government has been promoting the rezoning of no-go zones into three new categories: areas with an annual radiation exposure of over 50 millisieverts where residents' return is difficult, areas with an annual radiation exposure between 20 millisieverts and 50 millisieverts where residency is restricted, and areas with an annual radiation exposure of 20 millisieverts or lower that are in preparation for the suspension of evacuation orders.

The prefectural town of Naraha, whose new zones went into effect at 12 a.m. on Aug. 10, is the fifth municipality in which re-designation has taken place. Of the six municipalities that have yet to be rezoned -- the towns of Okuma, Kawamata, Tomioka, Namie and Futaba, and the village of Katsurao -- the mayors of all but Futaba told the Mainichi Shimbun that they are making steps toward re-designation, including hosting information sessions for residents.

The municipalities' decision to move forward with rezoning came after the central government announced its criteria for lost property compensation payments in late July.

Want your pets or not?

August 14, 2012

Govt. to survey Fukushima disaster zone pet owners

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120814_19.html

The Japanese government plans to ask evacuees from around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to decide whether they will take back pets they were forced to leave behind.

The Environment Ministry picked up about 750 dogs and cats in the no-entry zone and transported them to safety after the disaster. The pets were abandoned when their owners were ordered to evacuate in March last year.

Some animals have since been returned to their owners, but about 300 remain unclaimed. This is because some owners fear their pets may be contaminated with radiation. Others say they cannot afford to keep pets while living in shelters.

Several hundred more dogs and cats are believed to still remain in the no-entry zone.

The ministry and Fukushima Prefecture have decided to ask some 1,000 former pet owners by phone or mail if they intend to take back their animals. The survey could start as early as this month.

If owners refuse, officials will look for other people to adopt the pets. They also plan to search for missing pets in the no-entry zone.

Graveyard decontaminated

August 13, 2012

No-go zone graves visited for 1st time since quake

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120813003871.htm>

TAMURA, Fukushima--Residents of a district that had been in the no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were able to visit their family graves Monday during the Bon festival for the first time since the nuclear crisis started last year.

Residents of the Miyakojimachi district of Tamura could visit the graves because **decontamination work at the cemetery had been completed.**

The district's no-go designation was relaxed in April to prepare for the return of residents. Full-fledged decontamination work started in late July and is continuing. The district's graveyard and shrine were given top priority due to requests from residents.

Some stones at the cemetery remained toppled after being damaged by last year's March 11 earthquake. A 44-year-old man, who lives in a home in the city provided by the government, visited the cemetery with his family. He washed a fallen gravestone, and put his hands together as he prayed in front of it.

"Since the decontamination work is finished, I brought my eldest son, who's a sixth-grader at primary school, with me here for the first time" since the disaster, he said. "I have to give up on trying to put the gravestone back today. I hope the government will let us go back home soon."

Young people urged to return home

August 15, 2012

Village emptied by nuke crisis holds coming-of-age day

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120815b2.html>

FUKUSHIMA — The village of Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, on Tuesday held its first coming-of-age day ceremony since it was removed from the radiation no-go zone in January and the mayor urged its evacuated citizens to return home.

Kawauchi, located just 20 km southwest of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, was one of nine municipalities designated by the central government as being within the no-go zone.

Last year, the village held its coming-of-age festivities, which fete people turning 20 years old, in the city of Koriyama, where it had relocated its administrative office.

In January, Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo called on villagers to return home and the administrative office reopened in March.

The ceremony this year was held in the village's community center for around 30 new adults. They are among 40 from the village who came of age in the year through March 31.

"Right after the quake, I wasn't even sure whether I could go to a university. Many people supported me while I was away from my hometown. I would like to contribute to rebuilding my hometown in the future," said Kengo Sanpei, 19, who was in his final year of high school when the disasters struck and now attends a university in Tokyo.

Mayor Endo told the ceremony that he hopes young people will work together to rebuild the village. Around 350 of the roughly 2,800 inhabitants of the village have returned home

So many volunteers to help

August 19, 2012

Volunteers flock to city in Fukushima after lifting of no-go zone designation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120819p2a00m0na006000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- Ever since this city's no-go zone designation was lifted, volunteers from across the country have been flocking to help local residents reclaim their pre-disaster lives.

The no-entry designations for the Odaka and Haramachi districts of Minamisoma were lifted in April, a year after they went into effect. However, because basic infrastructure has yet to be rebuilt and decontamination work has not been completed, neither residents nor volunteers are permitted to stay overnight. Many of the approximately 4,000 households that were struck by the quake and tsunami remain untouched since the disasters.

Since mid-May, the city's reconstruction volunteer center has accepted volunteers -- to be dispatched to private homes -- on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and every day for the month of August. There were initial concerns that labor would be in short supply, but through July, some 150 to 200 volunteers showed

up per week, and as for August, some weeks have seen over 300 volunteers. Sometimes volunteers have had to be turned away because there are too many of them.

At 9 a.m. one Friday, some 30 people dressed in work clothes gathered in front of the volunteer center. Most were company workers or retirees. Although radiation levels are measured at the homes where volunteer work is conducted to ensure safety, city officials call on volunteers to refrain from participating if they have concerns.

"Volunteer insurance does not cover the effects of radiation," a coordinator explained. Still, not one person left.

One group of about a dozen volunteers headed toward the Odaka district in several cars, whose license plates showed how far many of them had travelled; one 70-year-old man had even driven a small truck for two-and-a-half days from Miyazaki Prefecture. Many of the volunteers said they had never volunteered before the post-disaster recovery efforts.

The cars arrived at a 40-year-old house. The residents appeared to have left in haste immediately following the massive quake on March 11, 2011, as a pot was found still sitting on a low dining table in the living room, and plates were scattered about in the kitchen. The volunteers' task was to help round up the residents' valued possessions and get rid of things that were no longer needed.

Photo albums and furniture were carried out of the house, which was filled with a moldy odor. During breaks, the volunteers -- who had become close through their repeated trips to Minamisoma -- chatted warmly with one another. Sometimes they even meet up back in the Tokyo area.

Masataka Miyazaki, 38, from Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, spends most of his weekends in Minamisoma. He'd previously volunteered washing photos found in tsunami-hit areas, where he says some photos never made it back to their owners.

"People really appreciate it when you clean their homes and remove rubble for them, and it makes me happy to be able to play a part in the reconstruction," he said.

In gardens and fields, Masaru Shimada, 54, from the Saitama prefectural capital of Saitama, operated a grass mower. Saying he's "become attached to the area," he goes to Minamisoma almost every other week, and has found a family nearby to put him up in the evenings. His portable radiation dosimeter doesn't show any great increase in radiation levels. Sometimes, he even brings his eldest son, a second-year student in junior high school, to volunteer with him.

When work for the day ended at 3 p.m., the floors of the house were cleared of most of the items that covered them in the morning. Shimada said he gets a lump in his throat when he sees more and more homes cleaned up and finds residents returning to them.

"What I'm doing might just be for my self-satisfaction, but I want to be able to see the recovery through," he said.

Safer rice

August 21, 2012

Fukushima govt to use stricter rice screenings

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120820003678.htm>

FUKUSHIMA (Jiji Press)--This year's rice harvest is set to start soon in Fukushima Prefecture, with local authorities introducing a system to check all bags of rice for radiation before shipments nearly 1-1/2 years after the nuclear accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Last year, confidence in Fukushima-grown rice was shaken when radioactive cesium levels exceeding the state-set limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram were found in local produce after the Fukushima prefectural government had declared the safety of crops harvested within the prefecture, excluding areas near the TEPCO plant, which was knocked out by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

By introducing the new screening system, the Fukushima government hopes to ensure full safety for this year's harvest. **The prefecture is a key production center for the Japanese food staple**, prefectural government officials said.

Each bag contains 30 kilograms of rice. The nationwide limit for radioactive cesium in rice will be cut to 100 becquerels per kilogram in October.

The prefecture, however, will apply the new limit earlier for the new screening procedure and discard any bags of rice containing cesium above the new threshold.

Screenings under the stricter method are likely to start this weekend, covering the early harvest.

Harvests of the popular Koshihikari rice variety are expected to get into full swing in early September.

The Fukushima government will check for radiation rice samples from all districts where planting has been permitted--as it did in 2011--to determine whether the districts will be allowed to ship rice. The comprehensive screening of all bags will be carried out in addition to sample checks, the officials said.

Online cesium values for rice

August 23, 2012

Rice cesium levels to go online

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120823a5.html>

FUKUSHIMA — The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to launch an online system that allows consumers to check the radioactivity of raw rice, it was learned Wednesday.

The prefecture is scheduled to begin conducting radiation checks this week on all shipments of raw rice produced in Fukushima.

Only bags that exhibit less than 100 becquerels of cesium per kilogram, the government-set limit, are allowed to be shipped.

All 30-kg bags of raw rice will be labeled with 16-digit identification numbers. Consumers will be able to look up the cesium level of a particular bag by inputting its ID number into a website jointly run by the prefecture, agricultural cooperatives and other bodies.

The system, however, will only work for raw rice, not polished rice, and will not contain data on radioactive substances other than cesium.

The prefecture plans to launch the system by Saturday, when it is scheduled to begin checking early rice.

No need for rolling blackouts

August 25, 2012

Rolling blackouts this summer averted by public power-saving efforts

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120825a5.html>

Kansai Electric Power Co. and three other utilities are likely to avoid rolling blackouts this summer because public and private conservation efforts have kept power demand comfortably in check, officials said Thursday.

In Kepeco's area, where the supply-demand situation was played up as a crisis, power use peaked on Aug. 3 but was actually 13 percent lower than the peak logged during the record-hot summer of 2010, reaching only 26.82 million kw.

In Kyushu, maximum demand was 15.21 million kw on July 26, down about 13 percent from its 2010 peak.

In fact, maximum power demand from July through Thursday in 90 percent of the nation's power utilities fell by about 8 to 16 percent compared with 2010 levels, data made available by the utilities showed.

In Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s region, demand this summer has only reached a high of 50.38 million kw so far, down about 16 percent from the 2010 high. That high occurred on July 27.

The government used dire warnings of electricity shortages to justify the restart of two nuclear reactors at Kepeco's Oi plant in Shiga Prefecture, casting doubt on local conservation efforts.

Quake insurance sales up

More than half of the households nationwide that bought fire insurance in fiscal 2011 opted for earthquake coverage as well, topping 50 percent for the first time ever, an industry body said Thursday.

The devastating earthquake in March last year stimulated demand for quake insurance, according to the Non-Life Insurance Rating Organization of Japan.

Quake insurance is sold as an option to fire insurance policies. Of all fire policies sold during the year that ended in March, 53.7 percent included quake insurance coverage, up 5.6 points from the previous year and exceeding 50 percent for the first time since compilation of such data began in fiscal 2001, the organization said.

The highest ratio, 81.1 percent, was registered in Miyagi Prefecture, one of the three most severely damaged by last year's massive earthquake and tsunami. Fukushima Prefecture, which was ravaged by the catastrophe and a nuclear disaster, posted the largest rise, of 18.0 points, to 58.1 percent.

As of the end of fiscal 2011, 26.0 percent of households nationwide were covered by quake insurance, up 2.3 points from a year earlier.

¥180 billion in subsidies

The Reconstruction Agency said Friday it will provide a combined ¥180.6 billion in subsidies to support local efforts to rebuild from last year's massive earthquake and tsunami.

The money will be distributed to the governments of four disaster-hit prefectures and 56 municipalities in nine prefectures to help residents put their lives back in order. It will be the third tranche of subsidies to be provided for reconstruction and will exceed the requests by 27 percent.

A total of ¥59.2 billion will be allocated for collective relocation of damaged communities to safer places. The construction of around 6,400 houses is expected to start in 77 communities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures by December.

Fukushima rice awaits testing

August 25, 2012

Full-scale radiation testing begins on Fukushima rice



Bags of rice await testing in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu on Aug. 25. (Mainichi)
<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120825p2a00m0na011000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Radiation testing due to be performed on every bag of rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture this year started Aug. 25 in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu.

Tests for radioactive materials that have contaminated many areas of the prefecture in the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are expected to be conducted on some 360,000 metric tons of rice from areas where the government has not restricted rice planting. Farmers will be banned from shipping rice whose radioactivity measures over 100 becquerels per kilogram.

Last year sample testing was conducted to screen out contaminated rice. However, after the prefecture announced that the rice was safe, levels of contamination exceeding the interim limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram were detected. As such, the prefecture decided this year to test all rice, using 190 testing devices that screen rice on conveyor belts.

On Aug. 25, 420 kilograms of early harvest Gohyakugawa rice, packed into 14 bags, underwent testing in Nihonmatsu. Takayuki Anzai, who had his rice tested, said **he was worried whether consumers would buy the rice even if the level of radiation was below the permissible level.**

"I'm also only half-happy about the harvest, and my emotions are mixed," he said.

Shipments of rice from the prefecture will peak in early October, when the main rice crop, Koshihikari, is harvested.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato, who attended a ceremony to mark the start of testing stated: "By testing all bags, we can deliver rice to consumers with peace of mind."

Fukushima rice now on sale

August 28, 2012

Fukushima rice put on sale after radiation test

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120828_26.html

This year's first rice harvest from Fukushima Prefecture has gone on sale after clearing radiation checks.

Radioactivity levels exceeding the government standard were detected in rice harvested in the prefecture last year following the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The prefecture is conducting mandatory tests on all rice before shipment this year.

A store run by the agricultural cooperative in Nihonmatsu City had 100 kilograms of the rice available for sale on Tuesday. The rice was harvested last week.

Cooked samples of the rice were offered to customers to try, and many bought 2-kilogram-size bags to take home.

Fukushima prefecture plans to use 192 radiation detectors to check all 360,000 tons of rice that will be harvested this season.

Tablet computers to keep people connected

August 28, 2012

Tablet PCs help Iitate's evacuees stay connected

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120828a2.html>

FUKUSHIMA — A communications system involving about 2,500 tablet computers is reconnecting village residents dispersed by the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Some 6,100 residents of Iitate, who were scattered after the nuclear crisis erupted at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, can now talk face-to-face online and get news and videos of their hometown via tablet PCs.

Iitate is the first crisis-hit municipality to use the devices, which were allocated to all households to help them keep in touch.

At a ceremony in the city of Fukushima to launch the system earlier this month, Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno used his tablet to call Joji Sato, who is living at a temporary facility in another city in the prefecture.

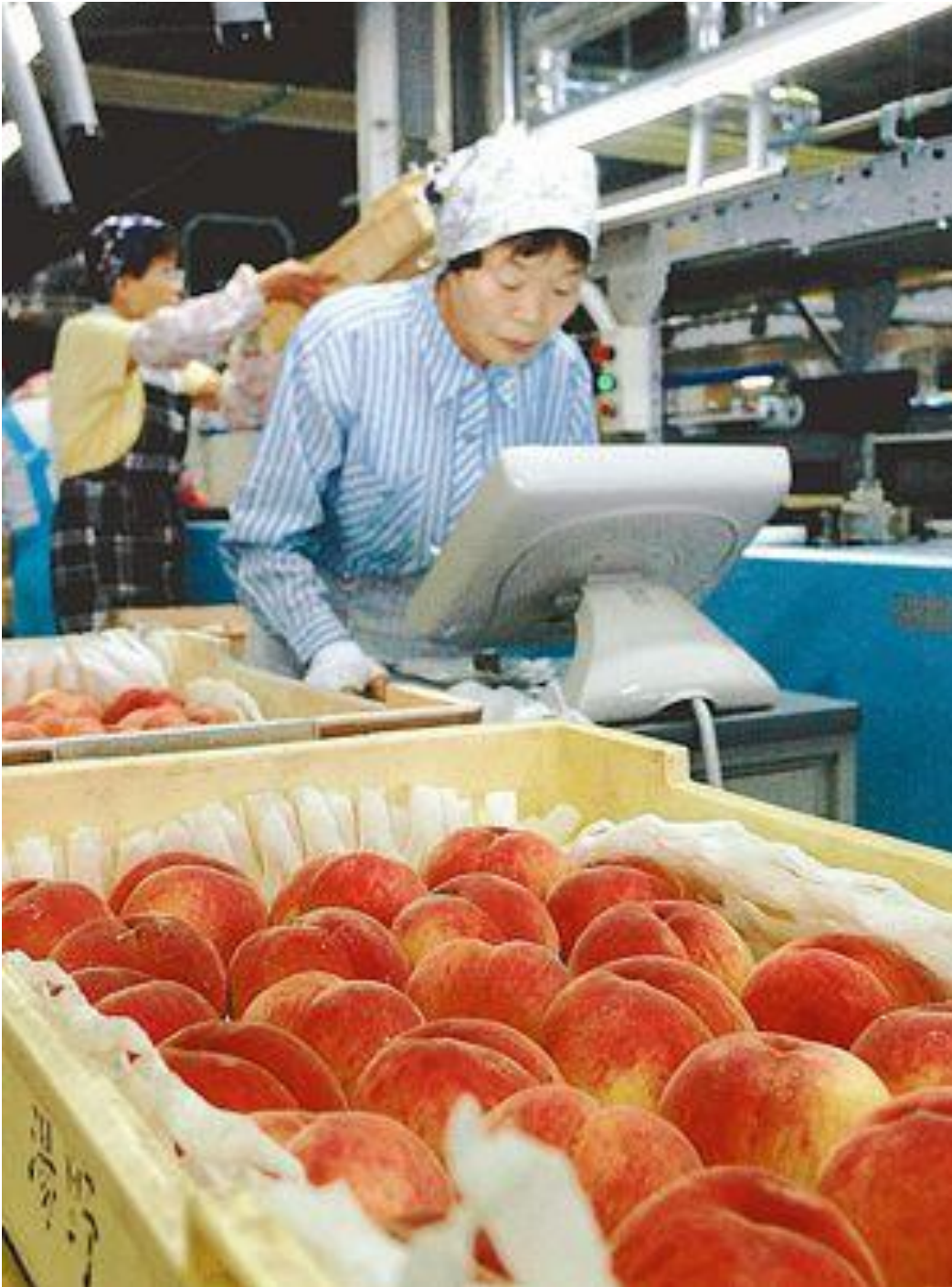
Sato, the 75-year-old head of the Iitate villagers' association, told the mayor he was doing well and said he hoped to master the tablet device in a couple of weeks.

Fukushima peaches

Fukushima peaches reclaiming lost ground

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120827003056.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun



A woman checks peaches before shipment at JA Shin-Fukushima's sorting facility in Fukushima on Aug. 18.

FUKUSHIMA--The price of peaches grown in Fukushima Prefecture has recovered to about 80 percent of the level before the Fukushima nuclear crisis started, as an intensive promotion campaign bears fruit.

Peach prices halved at one point after meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the March 2011 disaster generated fears about the safety of produce grown in the prefecture.

Spearheading the rebound has been a TV commercial featuring the pop group Tokio.

"Fukushima's peaches are filled with love," one member says in the commercial as another chomps into the fruit.

Tokio members grew their own produce on a small farm in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture--a town near the crippled nuclear plant--until the crisis began. Their farming activities were featured on Tokio's popular program "Za! Tetsuwan! Dash!!" broadcast on NTV.

The commercial, which first aired July 14, will run until the end of this month in the Tokyo metropolitan area, according to the Fukushima prefectural government. Customer reaction to the advertisement has been "very good," the government said.

The prefectural government has allocated about 242 million yen in this fiscal year's budget for media campaigns to promote the safety of local peaches and rice.

In Fukushima Prefecture, shipping of Akatsuki peaches has almost ended, while shipments of the Madoka variety are reaching their peak, according to JA Shin-Fukushima.

About 30,000 cases of peaches are shipped daily throughout the prefecture and to the Tokyo metropolitan area and the Kansai region. This season's peaches are delicious and sweet thanks to good weather, the agricultural society said.

The price of Fukushima peaches nose-dived last year due to rumors that whipped up radiation fears, which also hurt demand for peaches sold at pick-your-own farms or as gifts. Wholesale prices fell to about 200 yen per kilogram, about half the precrisis level.

According to the Japan Fruit Growers Cooperative Association, the average wholesale price of Fukushima peaches as of early August had rebounded to 357 yen per kilogram--81 percent of the price at the same time last year--in the nation's three biggest consuming regions: the Tokyo metropolitan area and the Chukyo and Keihanshin (Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe) areas.

Fukushima peach prices are expected to rise further next month when fewer peaches from other areas will be available.

Tokio has had plenty of support in getting sales of Fukushima peaches growing again.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato and other officials have traveled around the nation to promote produce grown in the prefecture, and **stringent checks on radiation levels in peaches** have helped the fruit's recovery.

JA Shin-Fukushima's website displays the results of radiation checks conducted by its member farmers.

In addition to peaches, Fukushima Prefecture will soon start shipping its grapes, pears and apples. "We'll conduct radiation checks on these products to show they're safe to eat," a prefectural government official said.

Compensation for damages to tourism

6 more prefectures named in nuke crisis compensation standards for tourism industry

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120828p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Six new prefectures have been named in compensation standards to cover financial damage caused to the tourism industry by radiation fears stemming from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the government announced on Aug. 27.

The compensation standards for the tourism industry in six prefectures -- **Aomori, Akita, Yamagata, Iwate, Miyagi and Chiba** -- were unveiled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's center for resolving nuclear disaster compensation disputes, which steps in when a compensation claimant and Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) can't agree on a damages amount.

Under the previous standards, tourism businesses in Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma prefectures could make compensation claims for revenues lost due to plunging visitor numbers in the wake of the Fukushima plant meltdowns. The rules allowed businesses in other areas to make compensation demands, but regional governments and business groups had called for the official list of eligible prefectures to be expanded.

According to the compensation dispute center, the expansion of the compensation area came after some 30 damages claims were filed by those in the tourism industry in the six newly designated prefectures, confirming that radiation fears were indeed keeping tourists away. The center also noted that negotiated settlements between TEPCO and claimants may not strictly abide by the 70 percent compensation standard.

Group tour operators hard-hit by a sharp drop in school excursions and other children's group travel, meanwhile, can claim up to 100 percent of lost revenues, because the drop-off in this sector is thought to stem from parents' concerns over children's susceptibility to radiation exposure.

Working on (rice) consumers

Aug. 26, 2012

On the safe side: A bag of local rice harvested Thursday undergoes inspection for radiation Saturday in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. KYODO



Fukushima starts radiation checks on all rice

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120826a3.html>

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima Pref. — The Fukushima Prefectural Government is now checking all bags of rice for radiation.

Gov. Yuhei Sato, who visited an inspection center in Nihonmatsu on Saturday, the first day of the comprehensive inspections, said that he "wants safe Fukushima rice to be delivered across the country."

The checks were deemed necessary to allay fears caused by the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 power station.

The first day saw 14 30-kg bags of early harvest rice produced in Nihonmatsu inspected.

The equipment took only about 10 seconds to check each bag, with all of the bags showing radioactivity levels below 11 becquerels per kilogram, the lowest measurable limit.

Rice farmer Takayuki Anzai, 58, smiled after his first bag passed the check.

"I don't think that consumers will feel safe immediately, but we have to demonstrate scientifically proven safety and security," Anzai said.

The size of this year's rice harvest in Fukushima Prefecture is expected to total some 360,000 tons, or some 12 million bags, according to the prefectural government. Most of the checks will be finished by the end of the year.

In October, the central government plans to tighten the allowable radioactive cesium level in rice to 100 becquerels per kilogram from the current 500 becquerels.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has decided to apply the new limit to all newly harvested rice in advance. Rice with radioactivity levels above the limit will be discarded.

Come back to school

August 27, 2012

Schools in Fukushima town reopen after 1 1/2 years

HIRONO, Fukushima -- Public elementary and junior high schools here reopened Aug. 27, a year and a half after the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered a crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and the town fell under the government-designated emergency evacuation preparation zone.

The town held a joint reopening ceremony at Hirono Elementary School in a bid to encourage former town residents to come home nearly one year after the town's evacuation zone designation was lifted. Attending the ceremony were kindergartners and students and their parents.

But the number of students is now only around 20 percent of pre-disaster enrollment levels due to prolonged life at evacuation centers and lingering fears of radiation. The number of elementary school students totaled 65, or 23.6 percent of the total before the nuclear disaster, and that of junior high school students came to 31, or 18.5 percent of the total.

Even after this town was declared safe and extricated itself from the zone in September last year, local officials rented rooms at schools in neighboring Iwaki for Hirono students until the end of the first semester.

Chika Oide, a 14-year-old second-year student at Hirono Junior High School who commutes from temporary housing in Iwaki, says some of her classmates belonging to an academy inside the J-Village national soccer training center in her hometown are not returning from evacuation in Gotemba, Shizuoka Prefecture. But she says she wants to assist in holding a successful cultural festival this autumn.

Radioactivity "defied even centuries' worth of knowledge"

August 29, 2012

Nuke crisis tested oldest sake brewer

850 years on, Sudohonke taps deep into well of history

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120829f1.html>

By JUN HONGO

Staff writer

Over its 850 plus years, sake maker Sudohonke Inc. has endured wars, famines, earthquakes, plagues, droughts, storms and everything in between. But the nuclear crisis that started last year at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant was an unparalleled catastrophe that pushed it to the brink.

"Water is key to our products," Genuemon Sudo, president of Sudohonke, told The Japan Times in an interview earlier this month. "We were ready to close down if our sake was found to be contaminated by radiation."

Sudo is the 55th in the line of proprietors running the brewery in Kasama, Ibaraki Prefecture.

The origins of the brewery are lost in the depths of history, but a talisman kept by the company shows Sudo's ancestors were making sake in 1141 at the brewery's current location.

Sake was initially provided to the local noble clan as a form of paying taxes.

Sudo was initially unsure of succeeding his father as the brewery's president, but that changed when he was in high school. Upon learning that serving whiskey at Japanese restaurants was becoming popular, he felt the urge to provide his family's sake to those who hadn't tasted it.

During a visit to a Japanese restaurant in the United States in the 1980s, he was also appalled by the poor quality of sake being served to the customers.

"I wanted to go back to the basics and make good sake, using the best available resources. I wanted to prove that a truly good sake goes well with any type of food," he said.

Instead of focusing on expanding its business, the company today still sticks to this belief and prioritizes quality over quantity or profit.

During the brewing season that begins in November and ends in April, Sudohonke makes a mere 180 kiloliters annually, using only the water pumped from a local well and the finest rice.

However, the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, threatened to end the tradition, with the city of Kasama experiencing a level 6 quake on the Japanese intensity scale.

"I was driving my car when the quake struck and became afraid that it would flip over. That's how strong the shaking was," Sudo said.

The brewery experienced only minor problems, though, including some tilting of the sake tanks. Wisdom passed on from previous generations, acquired through decades and centuries of fighting natural disasters, played a role in minimizing the damage from March 11.

Sudohonke lived on a family precept not to cut down any trees on its land, which may have helped strengthen the ground it stands on, Sudo said.

Another principle handed down by his ancestors was to avoid moving near the seashore or the mouth of a river.

The Ibaraki shoreline, though not as severely hit as coastal areas in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, experienced substantial damage from the tsunami. But the release of radioactive fallout from Fukushima No. 1, located approximately 130 km from the brewery, defied even centuries' worth of knowledge.

Securing the safety of the water was key for Sudohonke. Sudo said that by March 20, the brewery had tested its wells for radiation, some of which had been dug hundreds of years ago.

The tests came back negative, but the brewery still submits water samples to research centers every two months to make sure contamination hasn't taken place.

"If we lose the water, there is no way we can maintain the business," Sudo said. Still, sales fell sharply following March 2011.

Sudohonke lost literally all of its overseas customers, which made up about 20 percent of its annual sales. The situation hasn't improved much 17 months since the disaster.

"Once the restaurants take our product off their menus, it's difficult to restart business with them. Our company began exporting sake in 1995, but we have to start everything from the beginning again," he said.

Sudo explained that there is no shortcut to recovering his company's sales.

Business, like the process of brewing sake, can only succeed if you take your time and work meticulously on the small details. The sake tanks have been reinforced to withstand another monster temblor.

If Sudo were to leave a note for future generations regarding the Great East Japan Earthquake and its consequences, it would be simple:

"Don't ever think that men can control nature. Don't cut down trees — just like our ancestors told us," he said, adding that preserving the environment is also a key to success for a fine brewery.

"Focusing on preserving nature is crucial to making a truly fine sake, and that is what matters the most. (The key to longevity) isn't about creating a popular brand or selling more products," he said.

As for his own career, Sudo said he looks forward to passing on the family business to his three children to secure more time for himself.

"There are four giant boxes we have kept in the company for years that are filled with receipts, memos and other paperwork from the past. Most of it appears to be from the Edo Period," he said. "It would be great if I can make the time to study them and organize the historic facts of our company and learn from it."

TEPCO's rate hike to cover thermal power generation

TEPCO raises household electricity rates by 8.46%

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120901p2g00m0dm003000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Saturday raised electricity rates for households by an average 8.46 percent **in response to the heavy financial burden stemming from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster last year.**

About 28.7 million contracts with households, small offices and stores in its service area including Tokyo are subject to the rate hike. For a standard household using 290 kilowatt hours per month under a 30 ampere contract, the monthly power bill will rise by 347 yen, or 4.82 percent, from August to 7,548 yen.

TEPCO says the main reason for the hike is **to help cover rising fuel costs for non-nuclear thermal power generation** to compensate for the halt in nuclear power generation following the Fukushima disaster, triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Higher fuel costs have become common among regional power utilities across the country, where most nuclear power plants remain suspended amid safety concerns.

Some economists expect utilities other than TEPCO to also consider rate hikes to overcome their tough business conditions.

It is the first time since the 1979-1980 oil crisis that TEPCO has resorted to a major rate hike based on a thorough cost review.

TEPCO had initially applied to the government to raise household electricity rates by an average 10.28 percent. But the government has called on the utility to slash personnel and other costs amid a public backlash, forcing it to trim the hike to 8.46 percent.

Other utilities would also have to undergo such government-led screening processes if they apply for rate hikes for households, which require the approval of the economy, trade and industry minister.

The Japan Research Institute said in a report on Aug. 7 that electricity rate hikes would become "inevitable" across the country amid a prolonged suspension of most nuclear reactors and that increased power bills may eventually have a "considerable impact" on households and businesses.

According to its estimate, the country's 10 regional utilities will see fuel costs for non-nuclear thermal power generation grow by between 3.7 trillion and 4.3 trillion yen in fiscal 2012 from fiscal 2010.

If the utilities try to recover the rise in costs from electricity users, they may need to raise power bills by between 26.9 percent and 31.3 percent compared with fiscal 2010, which would mean an additional annual burden of up to around 37,000 yen on households composed of two or more people, the report said.

After the government approved the rate hike, TEPCO received 1 trillion yen in public funds from a state-backed bailout fund on July 31, a move that put the company under effective state control.

TEPCO's electricity rates for corporate users have already been raised by an average of 14.9 percent.

Decontamination of Fukushima expressway

Expressway in Fukushima nuke disaster no-go zone to be decontaminated by June '13



In this March 2012 file photo, radioactive decontamination workers monitor radiation levels on a section of the Joban Expressway inside the no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. (Mainichi) <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120831p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Decontamination of the Joban Expressway running through the Fukushima nuclear disaster no-go zone will begin later this year and be completed by June next year, Environment Minister Goshi Hosono said on Aug. 31.

The decision is based on the results of decontamination experiments the Environment Ministry conducted from March to July at three locations on the 17-kilometer section of expressway inside the 20-kilometer radius no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The experiments included high-pressure washing and the removal of surface soil along the expressway.

As a result, radiation levels in Futaba, which at 227 millisieverts per year were the highest of the three locations, fell 81 percent to 44 millisieverts -- significantly lower than the 50 millisievert upper limit for the passage of ordinary vehicles.

The Joban Expressway connects Miyagi and Ibaraki prefectures via the Hamadori district of Fukushima Prefecture.

When fully opened to traffic, it is expected to be a key distribution route between the Tohoku and Kanto regions. The 17-kilometer section of expressway between the Hirono and Joban-Tomioka interchanges has been closed since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

Furthermore, construction work on a 32-kilometer section between Joban-Tomioka and Minamisoma interchanges, which was to have been completed by fiscal 2011, has been suspended because of the impact of the nuclear crisis.

The construction work will resume if decontamination work decreases radiation levels in the area sufficiently.

Sluggish response from TEPCO plus insufficient number of lawyers

September 1, 2012

Nuclear accident settlement procedure slow

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120901_17.html

Saturday marks one year since a government arbitration body began accepting damages files from victims of last year's nuclear accident. However, arbitration officials say only one seventh of the filed damages cases have reached legal settlements in the past year.

The Japanese government set up the arbitration body to mediate settlements between victims and Tokyo

Electric Power Company, the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The arbitrators say that of 3,793 cases they have accepted by Friday, only 520 have been settled.

They say it took about 6 months to settle each case, 3 months longer than the original target.

The arbitration center says there are an insufficient number of lawyers. It also says the utility has been slow to respond in some cases.

The center plans to increase the number of lawyers from 130 to 280 by the end of the year, and to urge TEPCO to respond more quickly.

The head of the center Hiroshi Noyama says they are aiming to settle each case in 3 months so that the victims can start to rebuild their lives as soon as possible.

Organised tours to Fukushima

September 2, 2012

Popular Fukushima revitalization tours receive subsidy boost from Tokyo gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120902p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Budget travel packages aimed at cheering up people in Fukushima and helping revitalize the prefecture still reeling from the nuclear disaster have been gaining popularity among tourists, prompting the Tokyo government to fork out additional subsidies to such tours, it has been learned.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has earmarked an additional 60 million yen in its fiscal 2012 budget to subsidize travel packages from Tokyo to Fukushima, for use starting in October. While the metropolitan government has earlier set aside some 110 million yen in budget for such subsidies in the current fiscal year, it turned out that the amount is set to be used up by the end of September.

Under the scheme, people who live, work or study in the capital can benefit from the subsidy program by applying for tours offered by travel agencies registered with the metropolitan government. Participants can get a 3,000 yen discount for an overnight tour to Fukushima and a 1,500 yen discount for a one-day trip to the prefecture. The metropolitan government provides subsidies for up to two nights for each overnight tour.

Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March last year, the metropolitan government began subsidizing overnight tours from Tokyo to Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. The 50,000 nights worth of subsidies allocated to such tours in the fiscal 2011 budget were used up, proving the popularity of the initiative. In fiscal 2012, the metropolitan government limited the destination of such tours to Fukushima Prefecture only and additionally created one-day tour packages. The program proved so popular once again that tour packages worth 20,000 nights and 15,000 one-day trips will have been sold out by September -- half a year earlier than scheduled.

The metropolitan government's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs decided to continue the program by increasing the budget, and has started soliciting travel agencies that are willing to use the subsidy system for the October-December 2012 period, during which tour packages worth 5,500 nights and 3,000 one-day trips will be subsidized. Already, 272 travel agencies have registered for the system, up 34 companies compared to the figure in the first half of 2012. Applicants for the subsidy system for the January-March 2013 period will be solicited later.

The financial assistance program has been hailed by both tourists and travel agencies. In a survey conducted by Club Tourism International Inc. on 1,000 people who visited Fukushima on such tours between June last year and April this year, more than 90 percent responded that they "want to revisit" the prefecture. An official with the public relations office at JTB Corp. also hailed the program, saying, "The metropolitan government's subsidy system has the effect of giving a prod to those who think, 'I'm afraid of radiation but would like to support the recovery of Fukushima.' Participants of such tours are likely to travel there again as well."

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government's tourism exchange division, the number of tourists to the prefecture stood at about 57 million in 2010, which dropped by 40 percent in 2011 after the triple disasters. The figure has been on a recovery trend this year, but is still more than 30 percent short compared to that prior to the disasters.

"The metropolitan government's initiative has been of considerable help to us. Having people visit Fukushima provides a foothold for recovery here," said an official with the division.

Evacuees to return in 2 years?

September 4, 2012

Fukushima zones to be prepared for evacuees' return in two years

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120904x2.html>

Kyodo

The Reconstruction Agency said Tuesday it will aim to allow evacuees to return in two years to zones in Fukushima Prefecture where preparations are under way for lifting emergency off-limits orders.

The agency specified the goal in a grand plan for 12 municipalities where evacuation zones were designated due to radioactive fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The zones have recently been reclassified into three groups — those whose evacuation orders will be immediately lifted, those where preparations will be made to lift the orders and those that will remain off-limits.

The plan calls for the central government to join with Fukushima Prefecture and the 12 municipalities to dispose of radioactive soil, develop residential areas and create new industries.

It calls for developing infrastructure and supporting evacuees to allow them to resettle in the zones in two years.

In five years, it seeks to promote industrial and farming operations to accelerate the reconstruction of these zones. In 10 or more years, the design envisages measures to be taken to recover employment levels.

Radiation detectors in cafes and restaurants reassure people

September 5, 2012

To allay Fukushima fears, radiation checks made easy in Tokyo cafes, stores

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201209050004>

By MIAKO ICHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

In a peaceful ivy-covered restaurant in the Fussaninomiya district in Fussa, western Tokyo, several women and children are having lunch. In the corner sits a machine that looks like a rice cooker. It is a radiation detector, made in Belarus.

When three reactors melted down in Fukushima Prefecture in March 2011, dumping radioactive materials across large areas of land and ocean, many people in Japan feared for their health and that of their growing children.

"I wasn't confident I could serve food and tell people it was safe to eat," recalled 49-year-old owner Osamu Matsuo. He shuttered the restaurant for half a year after the Fukushima disaster.

In January this year, Matsuo bought the detector and welcomed diners once more. He now checks all meals and drinks served in Restaurant Aurora. He proudly declares it a "becquerel-free restaurant."

"We need places where we can check that food is safe, in a calm manner," he said. Matsuo said many people in Japan are uncomfortable dealing with those who worry about the threat of radiation. They silence any discussion, he says, with remarks such as "You are too nervous," or "Quiet! You're making me worried."

Radiation monitoring stations now exist across Japan. Many are found in public facilities, such as local council buildings, but an increasing number are offered by private restaurants and cafes.

Matsuo encourages customers to bring items to test. For this, a reading takes at least half an hour, and they will often have a meal while they wait.

One visitor today has brought soil from her garden. The woman, in her 30s and from Okegawa, Saitama Prefecture, grows vegetables including tomatoes.

"I feed them to my kids," she said. But she always fretted over whether the soil might be radioactive.

When she and her mother finished their lunch, Matsuo came over and explained the test results.

Another radiation station is inside a store in Tokyo's Kokubunji. The shop is run by a group that promotes raising children in a natural way. It serves healthy "slow food" in an adjacent cafe, and sells wooden toys and accessories in the store. The Kodomomirai measuring station offers two radiation detectors for customers to screen their rice and vegetables with.

"I want a kid, so I'm careful about what food I put in my body," says 30-year-old Aki Yabe, a homemaker from Nerima Ward, Tokyo. She has brought some rice sent by her father, but says it took courage to come and screen it. "I was so worried about actually coming to a measuring station."

Yabe was visibly nervous, but she seemed to relax after chatting on a bench with the manager, 39-year-old Hidetake Ishimaru.

He says it is common for visitors to confess their worries, such as whether to let children play outside.

"I think it's important to offer counseling as well as the facts," he says.

* * *

Some public radiation measuring stations in Tokyo:

Miyanaga Corp., Nihonbashi sea weed shop
(Chuo Ward / Tel 03-5623-1271)

CRMS Setagaya, public radiation measuring station
(Setagaya Ward / Tel 03-5787-8115)

Nippori radiation measuring station "Nikkori-kan"
(Arakawa Ward / Tel 03-3801-1211)

Kodomomirai measuring station
(Kokubunji / Tel 042-312-4414)

Hachioji public radiation measuring office, Hakaru Wakaru Hiroba
(Hachioji / Tel 042-686-0820)

Koganei city radiation measuring office
(Koganei / Tel 042-387-9831)

Public radiation measuring station Aurora
(Fussa / Tel 042-539-4139)

By MIAKO ICHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

Expanding fishing operations

September 10, 2012

Fishermen expand test catches off Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120910_12.html

Fishermen in Fukushima Prefecture have expanded their test catches to 10 types of marine products, 18 months after the nuclear accident.

A fleet of 11 fishing boats left a port in Soma City early on Monday.

Commercial fishing restarted on an experimental basis off Fukushima Prefecture in June. Catches were limited to one type of shellfish and 2 kinds of octopuses.

The prefectural fisheries association says consumers purchased the marine products caught in the area and trust the radiation tests that were carried out.

So it decided to expand the catches to 10 types of marine products, including one type of crab and one type of squid starting on Monday.

The association says it has found **no unsafe levels of radiation in any of the 10 types of seafood.**

The fresh catch will be shipped to local shops later in the day after being tested for radiation.

A local fishery cooperative official says fishing operations in the area are slowly returning to normal. But he says fishermen will have to be patient, as it will take time before they can resume full-scale operations.

First international flight from Fukushima since 3/11

September 10, 2012

International flight leaves Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120910_21.html

A chartered flight for Shanghai, China, has taken off from Fukushima Airport. It's the first international flight since last year's earthquake and nuclear accident suspended all regular international services from Fukushima.

A ceremony was held at the airport on Monday to mark the occasion.

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato said he is happy to see the first flight in 18 months take off. He said he will work with airport officials to resume regular services as soon as possible.

Sato will take the flight to visit Beijing and meet Chinese officials. He will request that China lift its travel restriction on Fukushima Prefecture and resume regular flights both ways.

A passenger in her 60s said she was traveling with her friends. She said messages should be sent out about how far Fukushima has recovered from the disaster.

The chartered flight to take tour groups from Japan to Shanghai has one more scheduled departure. But no plans for further flights have been made after that.

Before the disaster, regular flights from Fukushima served Shanghai and Seoul, South Korea.

Recovery plans in Fukushima still an issue

4 municipalities in Fukushima Pref. yet to form disaster recovery plans

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120910p2a00m0na009000c.html>



Rice plants are seen at a testing paddy in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, in this July 28 file photo, as decontamination work progresses in the area. (Mainichi)

Four towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture have yet to formulate recovery plans 18 months after the devastating March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, a Mainichi survey has found -- underscoring the long-term effects of the Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered by the quake.

The Mainichi conducted a survey on recovery measures in Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures ahead of the 1 1/2 year anniversary of the March 11, 2011 disaster. Municipalities were given until late August to submit responses.

In Fukushima Prefecture, the Mainichi surveyed 15 municipalities in coastal areas and evacuation zones. The town of Namie was one of four municipalities in the prefecture that have yet to form reconstruction plans. It said the nuclear disaster had prevented it from doing so.

Two of the 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture that have already formed recovery plans said they were planning to revise those initiatives. The town of Kawamata responded that it would revise measures on the return of evacuees, while the town of Naraha, which has also been affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster, explained that it would revise its recovery preparations as "daily circumstances have been changing since the formulation of plans, as seen in the rezoning of no-go areas."

Moves have been progressing in areas hit by the March 2011 tsunami to relocate communities as a disaster prevention measure. The Fukushima Prefecture municipalities of Shinchi, Soma and Minamisoma have received approval from the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism for the relocation of all homes under such measures, while the city of Iwaki has received approval for some 70 percent of homes due to be relocated. However, the town of Tomioka has not yet received approval for any home relocations. Officials say they will handle the issue once evacuation districts are realigned and work is carried out to decontaminate the town from radioactive materials emanating from the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

A **shortage of manpower** has been raised as an issue in areas recovering from the disaster, but 11 municipalities in the prefecture have received support workers from other local bodies. Most of the 11 cities, towns and villages that gave concrete figures for the shortage of workers said they lacked technical workers.

"Rumor damage" can be vital information

September 9, 2012

It will take more than a pop group to save Fukushima's reputation

By PHILIP BRASOR

Last March, Tatsuya Yamaguchi of the idol group Tokio told the media that he was determined to someday reopen Dash Village, the farm that he and his bandmates built from scratch as an ongoing project on their long-running Nippon TV series "The Tetsuwan Dash." The farm is in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, which was contaminated by radiation following the nuclear disaster of March 2011. The entire area was evacuated, and Tokio had to abandon the land they had so painstakingly transformed using traditional farming methods.

Yamaguchi's dream may never come true. Last week, "Tetsuwan Dash" launched a new project called Dash Island, which will see the quintet turn an uninhabited outcropping into something livable. For the last year, the Dash Village idea was kept on life support with segments called Dash Village Excursions, in which Tokio traveled to farms in other prefectures to learn different cultivation methods. But given the amount of time and money required to make an island habitable, it's doubtful they can devote any more to Dash Village, even if the area is declared safe and reopened, which is not likely to happen any time soon.

So the group has decided to give something back to the prefecture that became its second home. Since July Tokio has been appearing in TV commercials and transportation ads for Fukushima produce. At first, it shilled for peaches. Soon it will be boosting rice. According to the Yomiuri Shimbun, the prefectural government has set aside ¥242 million for media campaigns to convince the rest of Japan that Fukushima produce is safe. So far it seems to have worked. The price of Fukushima peaches has "recovered" to about 80 percent of its pre-nuclear-crisis level. At one point last year, the price had dropped to half its 2010 peak.

In contrast, the Asahi Shimbun's coverage of the same topic centers less on economics than on perception, and talks about more than peaches. The focus of Asahi's report is that "rumor damage" (*fuhyō higai*) still affects consumer attitudes toward Fukushima, though not necessarily in ways you might think. The local agricultural cooperative, JA Fukushima, analyzed prices at Tokyo's main wholesale market between April and August and found that for core Fukushima produce prices were not only lower than they were in 2010, but, except for peaches, also lower than they were in 2011.

In April the government introduced new radiation testing standards, and everything from Fukushima passed with flying colors, so why have prices not increased? Last year the media described how negative rumors from the disaster area were making it difficult for producers in the area to sell their wares. As a result while many consumers did avoid produce from the region, and continue to do so despite the encouraging test results, a good number last year also bought Fukushima products simply because they wanted to support the area. This "artificial eagerness" may be cooling down. Now that it seems agricultural products from Fukushima are safe, people don't feel they have to buy them any more. The chairman of JA Fukushima said as much at a recent meeting with the agricultural ministry.

This perception gap was also investigated by the Tokyo University of Agriculture, which surveyed market prices of vegetables from both Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures before and after the nuclear disaster, alongside related media reports. Ibaraki Prefecture was also affected by the disaster and, like Fukushima, is economically reliant on agriculture. TUA found that during 2011 retail prices for Fukushima produce did rise at some point, while Ibaraki prices dropped and remained low. At the same time, the number of news stories about Fukushima, the prefecture most closely identified with the nuclear disaster, was three times the number published about Ibaraki. Regardless of the content of the reports, the researchers concluded that the coverage effectively promoted Fukushima produce.

The agricultural ministry has sent notifications to other ministries, saying that consumers may forget about the disaster. It asks for the ministries' support in helping boost sales of products from Fukushima. Seven and i Holdings has said it will carry out a Tohoku sales promotion project at its stores, and the Tokyo Wholesale Market will set up special Fukushima booths at its October fair. Some retailers have questioned this "intervention," saying it will reinforce the impression that consumers still aren't buying Fukushima produce. Even a representative of the prefecture's publicity division told Asahi that it's time to promote the region's products in terms of quality and not as a bid for sympathy.

The argument obscures another more critical argument: Is the produce really safe? This debate is even more contentious, since it relies on scientific assessments whose reliability is not confirmed by consensus. Each side is associated with a side in the related nuclear-power debate. Those who believe Japan should continue with its nuclear-energy policy tend to also believe the fallout from Fukushima is negligible and that the media causes more pain and confusion by reporting it. Those who are against nuclear power tend to think that no level of radiation is safe and that the authorities, abetted by the same media, are not frank about the dangers. What one side calls "rumor damage" the other characterizes as vital information.

Last month the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War held a conference in Hiroshima, and two non-Japanese members talked to Tokyo Shimbun about Fukushima. Though they agree the situation there isn't as serious as it was at Chernobyl, they believe it is natural for residents to be anxious "because they can't get second opinions." All information is important when people are faced with decisions about their health and the health of their children.

No more concern about electricity shortages

September 9, 2012

Govt lifts power-saving targets for summer

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120908002695.htm>

Jiji Press

The government lifted on Friday its power-saving targets in western and southern regions as concerns over summer electricity shortages have faded.

Thanks to conservation efforts and the July restart of the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant, the region's power supply remained stable throughout the summer.

As a result, the region avoided rolling blackouts.

On July 2, the government asked households and businesses in the service areas of Kansai Electric, Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. to cut summer power consumption during peak hours by 5 percent to 10 percent from the levels of summer 2010.

All service areas achieved their respective targets. Kansai Electric saved about 11 percent while targeting a 10 percent cut. Shikoku Electric saw an 8.3 percent reduction, exceeding its 5 percent target. Kyushu Electric met its target of 10 percent.

Some fish types heavily contaminated

September 11, 2012

Fukushima aftermath: Fish contamination

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120911_13.html

Eighteen months after the nuclear accident in Fukushima, fishermen working mainly in Pacific coastal areas of northeastern Japan are catching more fish and shellfish off Fukushima Prefecture on a trial basis.

Marine experts are calling for detailed research of radioactive contamination of marine resources.

Following last year's nuclear accident in Fukushima, a fishing ban was imposed for safety reasons. But in June, commercial fishing restarted on an experimental basis off Fukushima for only of one type of shellfish and 2 kinds of octopuses.

On Monday, almost 18 months after the nuclear accident, fishery cooperatives in the Tohoku region, as well as Ibaraki Prefecture, began fishing 10 types of marine resources, including crabs and squids.

They intend to take the products to market if sample tests show no radioactive contamination.

High levels of radiation have recently been detected in some fish types. A cod landed at a port in Aomori Prefecture in early August was found to be exposed to 132.7 becquerels of radioactive cesium per kilogram. That was 1.3 times the government safety limit.

Radiation 380 times the limit was detected in a rock-trout caught off Fukushima in early August. A black sea bream caught off Miyagi Prefecture, in July was 33 times over the limit.

The rock-trout and black sea bream had the highest levels of contamination for each of the fish species.

Radioactive cesium is hardly detected in seawater.

Experts say the levels may be concentrated in the particular kind of fish that eat sandworms.

This suggests that cesium accumulated on the seabed is now being taken up by such fish.

They say the contaminated cod found in Aomori is likely to have accumulated cesium off Fukushima, as the fish species travels in wide areas of the sea.

Professor Takashi Ishimaru at Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology says radioactive levels in creatures that serve as prey may be high in some spots of the Pacific, due to the inflow of river water or sea currents.

He says **the cause of contamination should be closely studied according to the fish species to understand how the contamination has spread.**

Views from the street

September 11, 2012

Fukushima city: Are you happy with the post-3/11 reconstruction efforts in Tohoku so far?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20120911vf.html>

By MARK BUCKTON and KANSHI H. SATO

Mieko Sasaki
Housewife, 72

From the start nothing was managed properly. I'm upset that nothing has been resolved, even though I am 50-60 km away from (radiation) hot spots. I'm worried for the next generation but I want to say thank you to people from around the world for looking out for us in our hour of need.

Shoei Takahashi
Student, 19

The prefectural and national government are too slow in everything they do, so locals are acting for themselves, and in the end I think this will spread the radioactive materials. I want to see more effort from government at both the local and national level.

Miyuki Yamauchi
Architect, 37

Since the disasters of March 11, 2011, I find I'm always thinking about safety and the potential problems we could face in the future. As an architect, I think we need to budget and make solid plans for rebuilding and urban design, and in that regard, so far, so good.

Yuji Tarasawa
Sales, 24

The government has been collecting a lot of charity aid money since the disasters yet we know nothing about how it is being spent and how it is to be used. They really need to disclose details so local people know what is going on.

Yuka Fukushima
Student, 19

Actually, I live next to an active hot spot, and some people have left, so I am very worried. I want the government to do something to help us, but I think it is ridiculous to spread (contaminated) waste all over the country. We should keep it here in one place and not rely on others.

Yoshihisa Suzuki
Salesman, 45

Although there are a lot of demonstrations (against nuclear power) these days, they are still grassroots movements, and the politicians with the power to change things won't do so. The government doesn't care and has done nothing (to help people in Tohoku).

Who will compensate for lost homes?

September 11, 2012

1,300 households lost homes in Fukushima evacuation zones

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120911p2g00m0dm033000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- At least 1,300 households ordered to evacuate from areas within 20 kilometers of the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant lost their homes due mainly to the March 2011 tsunami, local officials said Monday.

These households had lived in Namie and five other coastal municipalities where evacuation orders were issued because of radioactive contamination from the damaged nuclear power plant.

While some evacuees are to be allowed to return to areas reclassified as safe, the cost of rebuilding their homes is expected to be a great impediment to their return.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the damaged nuclear plant, plans to pay compensation to evacuees for radioactive contamination of their properties. But its compensation will not cover houses washed away by the tsunami.

Evacuees who lost their houses will have to depend on financial support from the central government.

Sweet and delicious

September 12, 2012

Fukushima peaches sold overseas after 18 months

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120912_30.html

Peaches grown in Fukushima are being sold overseas for the first time since exports were halted because of the nuclear crisis 18 months ago.

The first shipment was sent to Thailand. About 900 peaches were displayed on Wednesday in a fruit shop at a department store in Bangkok.

Some shoppers purchased the peaches after enjoying a free sample. One woman who bought the fruit said she wasn't worried about radioactive contamination because she heard safety checks had been carried out. She said the peaches are sweet and delicious.

An official from Fukushima said exports resumed after the prefecture invited Thai retailers to inspect peach farms and sites where radiation checks are conducted.

Agricultural and marine products from Fukushima were halted after the nuclear accident due to fears of radioactive contamination.

Katsuhiko Noge of the Fukushima Prefectural Trade Promotion Council said he is happy to see the products being sold abroad again. He said his organization will do more to boost the sale of peaches.

Officials in Fukushima say the peaches will be sold in Thailand until the end of the week. They will consider an additional shipment depending on demand, and say they also hope to resume peach exports to other Asian countries.

Children under stress

September 12, 2012

Disaster-area kids under hard stress

Cooped up, inactive lives exacting toll on traumatized survivors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120912a7.html>

Jiji

The emotional scars of children living in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, which were the hardest hit by the March 2011 disasters, have not yet healed and many are burdened by trauma and mental stress.

Lone sentinel: The "Miracle Pine" that withstood last year's monster quake and tsunami in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, is aglow at dawn Tuesday, the 18-month anniversary of the March 11, 2011, catastrophes. KYODO



A year and a half have passed since the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and massive tsunami devastated the Tohoku region's coast and led to the triple-meltdown crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Many children have developed a fear of water and appear weak and prone to sickness. And in Fukushima, fears of radiation among adults appear to have had an impact on children.

"I can't let my children play outside," said Yuka Arimatsu, 35, a housewife living in the village of Nishigo, southern Fukushima, expressing the anxieties of many families in the prefecture about radiation and its effects on children.

Families fret about allowable cumulative radiation doses and what to feed their children on a daily basis.

As the views of parents differ, Arimatsu worries that "their anxieties are felt by their children."

Since the nuclear crisis started, her oldest son, who is in the first grade, has suffered a drop in appetite as opportunities for physical activity and outside recreation have decreased.

Her 2-year-old son has meanwhile become more prone to falling ill.

Mental health experts say that although the central government has increased the number of school counselors with the aim of providing sufficient mental care, there are still not enough. Now that the children's lives are beginning to return to a somewhat even keel, now is a crucial time to provide mental health care, experts said.

After the disaster, the Education Ministry employed more school counselors for the tsunami-hit regions. In the current fiscal year to next March, the ministry plans to increase the total number of counselors in the three prefectures to 3,929 on a weekly basis, up by 1,652 from the previous year.

Fukushima alone will have 2,190 more counselors, triple the figure of the previous year.

For people living in Fukushima, stress related to radioactive fallout has deepened.

Yuji Tsutsui, 47, a professor of experimental psychology at Fukushima University, said many 3-year-old children studied in areas with high radiation levels are displaying spoiled attitudes and clinging behavior toward their parents.

Tsutsui attributed the trend to parents with radiation-related anxieties and expressed concern that the future physical strength and weight of their children may be affected by the trauma.

In Koriyama, Fukushima, the weight of about 30 4-year-olds was recorded until they turned 5. It was found that their weight increased at an average annual rate of 2.4 kg before the disaster struck, but the annual rise shrank to 1.5 kg afterward.

Pediatrician Shintaro Kikuchi, 42, of Koriyama, who conducted the study, warned this is a clear sign something abnormal is occurring.

The numbers of extraordinary cases are also increasing in the coastal regions of Iwate and Miyagi. In southern Iwate, there was a rise in the number of elementary school children who declined to swim in a pool because of tsunami flashbacks.

At a junior high school in southern Miyagi, the number of students who were frequently unable to attend class because of headaches and stomachaches and visited the school nurse increased sharply this year.

Also, the effects of the disaster are manifested in different forms.

Child psychiatrist Hiroaki Honma, 62, chief of the children's center of the Miyagi Prefectural Government, said children are easily losing concentration and becoming irritable.

The three prefectures all have reported more cases of fighting among children as well as rises in sudden outbursts of violence and aggression.

Yuriko Kato, 39, a clinical psychotherapist in Iwate, said that "some children appear to be fine on the surface but may in fact be hiding their anxieties." She said it is necessary to pay close attention to those children whose attitudes are hard to recognize.

In Hyogo Prefecture, which was devastated by the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kobe, the need for mental health care for children and students increased three years after the quake.

Reiko Baden, 78, a professor emeritus at Kansai University of International Studies who provided support after the Kobe quake, stressed that symptoms that require care are more easily identifiable when children's lifestyles return to normal.

Baden added that it will be necessary for people around them to offer long-term support for the future.

But Junko Yagi, 44, a part-time instructor at Iwate Medical University, said there are too few experts in children's mental health care and the human resources are still far from adequate.

Exodus from North-East Japan

September 11, 2012

More than 75,000 people leave disaster-hit areas

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120911_28.html

An exodus is taking place from parts of northeastern Japan that were devastated by last year's massive earthquake and tsunami.

NHK surveyed the movement of people in and out of all 127 municipalities in the 3 hardest-hit prefectures --- Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate --- from March 2011 until the end of July, this year.

107 municipalities, or 84 percent, saw population drops, with nearly 76,000 people in total leaving the area. In a 5-month period starting this past March alone, about 18,000 people moved away.

The population outflow has been heaviest in Fukushima Prefecture, apparently due to the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The prefecture's 59 municipalities have experienced a total outflow of 45,000 since March 2011.

Among them, Koriyama city lost more than 10,000 people; Iwaki city, about 8,000, and Fukushima city, nearly 6,500.

These 3 cities are more than 30 kilometers away from the plant, but people apparently left due to worries about nuclear contamination.

In the 27 coastal municipalities struck by tsunami in the March disaster, nearly 15,000 people have moved away.

On the other hand, 20 cities, including Sendai and Morioka, have marked a total population surge of about 19,000. This suggests that people are relocating from coastal areas to urban centers, seeking jobs and houses.

The disaster left 343,000 people homeless. Many of them are scattered across the country, unable to return home.

Japan Women's University professor Takashi Abe says **the disaster-hit areas are experiencing a larger population outflow than the one that followed the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake.**

He says the government must create jobs and decontaminate the environment in order to facilitate the return of residents to the region and spur the pace of rebuilding.

More elderly evacuees in need of care

September 14, 2012

Health of elderly evacuees seen deteriorating

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120914f2.html>

Kyodo

SENDAI — The number of elderly people certified as needing care topped 110,000 in 42 communities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures at the end of June, up by 12,000, or 12 percent, from 2010, according to a Kyodo News survey.

The increase in the three prefectures hardest hit by the March 2011 disasters apparently indicates that the health of seniors, mainly in coastal areas damaged by the tsunami, has been deteriorating the longer they spend as evacuees.

It is notable that municipalities near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant saw drastic rises during the 2½-year period.

Residents of Okuma, where everyone was forced to evacuate because of radioactive fallout, marked a 50 percent jump in seniors needing special care.

In the 42 communities studied, the number of elderly certified as requiring care stood at 97,827 as of the end of March 2010, and edged up to 99,050 one year later, shortly after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis.

It came to 108,007 as of the end of March this year, attributable to the prolonged period spent in emergency housing, before reaching 110,039 three months later, the survey found.

"The living environment of elderly people affected by the disaster has been drastically changing," an official in the tsunami-damaged city of Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, said. "We have concerns that the number of those who need intensive care due, for example, to dementia may increase."

Compensation for fear

September 13, 2012

Compensation sought for losses from N-fears

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120913003724.htm>

SENDAI (Jiji Press)--Damages to farmers and tourism-related firms from public fears arising from the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant should be covered in compensation payments, the Miyagi and Iwate prefectural governments said Wednesday.

The two prefectural governments will submit their request to the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled nuclear power plant, prefectural officials said.

The request is scheduled to be filed Friday, when Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai and Iwate Gov. Takuya Tasso are to visit TEPCO, the industry ministry and the science ministry, prefectural officials said.

A mixture of hope and anxiety

September 16, 2012

Energy shift generates hope, anxiety

Plan to phase out nuclear power gutsy but fraught with unknowns

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120916a5.html>

By MAI IIDA
Kyodo

About a year and a half into the Fukushima nuclear crisis, Japan's energy policy is at a turning point as the government vows to pursue the elimination of atomic power by the 2030s.

But the government's new policy, which calls for a significant rise in renewable energy, has divided opinion, with some looking at it with hope and others with anxiety.

The policy shift could be a big opportunity for businesses involved in renewable energy and energy-saving technologies.

Other companies also stand to gain, including a unit run by mobile phone operator Softbank Corp. that is gearing up to build solar plants and wind farms.

Concerns remain, however, over how the transition will affect society overall, including economically.

"I think we should increase the use of renewable energy, but it is just too risky to place too much hope on it," Keigo Akimoto, a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo, said, citing concerns over the stability of renewable energy, its output, how fast it will spread and the impact of the expected rise in electricity bills.

Akimoto, an environmental policy researcher, said the government's plan to triple electricity output from solar and other renewable energy sources to 300 billion kwh by 2030 from their 2010 level is "too optimistic."

Under its earlier estimate, the government said the number of houses with solar panels should be jacked up to 12 million nationwide from 0.9 million in 2010 to help reduce nuclear power to zero in 2030. It also urged a rapid expansion in wind farms to 610 by 2030, up from just 30 in 2010.

In 2010, nuclear power supplied about 26 percent of the nation's energy needs. Then came the March 2011 triple-meltdown crisis at the temblor- and tsunami-struck Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, an event that precipitated the shutdown of the rest of the nation's 50 viable reactors.

The disaster destroyed public confidence in the nuclear power program, which had for decades been promoted as safe, cheap and clean. It also prompted the government to declare the new, zero-nuclear policy goal on Friday that promises to do away with atomic power in the 2030s.

Before the Fukushima crisis, the government planned to boost Japan's reliance on nuclear power to 53 percent by 2030.

According to government data, if Japan abandons nuclear power by 2030, the average monthly electricity bill for nonsingle households will swell to ¥32,243 from ¥16,900 in 2010. Abandoning nuclear power will also weigh down gross domestic product, the government data said.

But Hiroshi Takahashi, research fellow at Fujitsu Research Institute, believes replacing nuclear with renewable energy is "not impossible" and that Japan should take this opportunity to initiate a transformation of its industrial structure.

"I think we are confronting the issue of deciding what kind of industrial structure the nation should seek," he said.

While affirming that Japan's traditionally strong manufacturing sector is definitely important, Takahashi said that energy efficiency should be a part of that.

"Shouldn't we shift to creating more value-added products that require less electricity?" he asked, citing renewable energy and power conservation services as areas requiring more focus.

The government plans to encourage competition in the power market by liberalizing the retail electricity market and reforming the electricity transmission system as well.

Achieving the transition will require steady enforcement of the feed-in tariff scheme introduced in July to promote renewable energy, a revamped electricity grid and looser regulation, Takahashi said, adding the government should be more aggressive in encouraging citizens' efforts to both generate and save electricity.

National policy minister Motohisa Furukawa said after formulating the energy policy that achieving the "green energy revolution" could reverse the current assumption that electricity consumption trends bear a direct relationship to economic expansion.

"Some people may say it is impossible. But think about it. Who on Earth expected 20 years ago to see mobile phones and smartphones used so much in today's society?" he asked at a press conference.

"I'm confident that the realization of the green energy revolution can lead to a series of innovations, like the IT (information and technology) revolution did, and bring significant change to society in the near future," Furukawa said.

But the researcher noted that the plan's success hinges on the degree of public participation, and that this could determine when and whether Japan can indeed achieve a nuclear-free society.

Japanese fishing

September 9, 2012

Tohoku fisheries fight back from 3/11

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20120909x1.html>

By HILLEL WRIGHT

Special to The Japan Times

"The facts about much of Japan's social, political, and financial life are hidden so well that the truth is nearly impossible to know," writes Alex Kerr in his acclaimed 2001 study "Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Japan." He continues, "A lack of reliable data is the single most significant difference between Japan's democracy and the democracies of the West."

This insight goes a long way toward explaining the curious fact that the latest figures from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries for marine fisheries and aquaculture — released this year, but pertaining to 2010 — exclude data from the prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

As it happens, of course, it was precisely those parts of the Tohoku region of northeastern Honshu that were most gravely damaged by the tsunami following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. Since those three prefectures generate 10 percent to 12 percent of all domestic fisheries landings, it would appear that some public servant somewhere felt a huge drop in total production nationwide would look bad on the record for 2011, which will be released in 2013. Hence the incomplete information for 2010 to make such comparisons well-nigh impossible.

However, figures compiled after the March 11, 2011, magnitude 9 earthquake and the 9-meter to 30-meter-high tsunami it generated show that 25,014 fishing vessels were lost or damaged, at a cost of ¥1.7 trillion, and that 319 fishing ports were destroyed, at a cost of some ¥8.2 trillion.

Although seven prefectures along the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region were directly affected by the disaster, the three for which fishery landings data for 2010 have not been released suffered by far the most. Specifically, Iwate lost 95 percent of its 10,522 fishing boats; Miyagi lost nearly 90 percent of the 13,570 commercial boats registered there; and Fukushima lost more than 80 percent of its 1,068-boat fleet.

Even worse was the destruction of ports — both infrastructure and facilities. Iwate lost 98 percent of its 111 ports; Miyagi lost all its 142 ports; and of Fukushima's 10, all were lost.

The loss of ships and ports in these three prefectures plus damages to the north in Aomori Prefecture and along the Pacific coast of Hokkaido, and to the south in Ibaraki and Chiba prefectures, resulted in a 22 percent reduction of Japan's total marine fishery, which has amounted to more than 5 million tons annually since 2000. These seven prefectures, which comprise about 16 percent of Japan's population, produce 33 percent of its fish and seafood.

In spite of the near-unimaginable scale of the damage, the Japanese spirit remained unquenched and the fishing community's vitality undaunted. On April 14, 2011, fishing resumed at Shiogama Port in Miyagi Prefecture, which is one of the largest ports in the Tohoku region. The first fishing ship to make port was the Hoyo Maru No. 18, a tuna longliner loaded with about 17 tons of fish, mostly tuna. There were no reports of radiation. Prices for big-eye tuna were ¥5,800 per kg — nearly double the usual price of ¥3,000 per kg.

By June 2011, Kesenuma, which is also in Miyagi Prefecture and is the region's major fishing port for landings of skipjack tuna (*katsuo*) had removed many tons of debris, re-elevated the pier that was submerged due to land subsidence, and begun to receive deliveries of skipjack, one of Japan's fisheries' most important species. But a prefectural official said, "The catch right after we restart is expected to be about 50 tons to 100 tons a day, which is less than one-eighth of an average year's daily catch."

This writer visited Oarai, Ibaraki Prefecture, on Sept. 12, 2011, six months and a day after the massive quake struck, producing a giant whirlpool in the harbor and a 4-meter tsunami that inundated the fishing port and swept cars off the highway. The outer harbor, which berthed freighters, was littered with dozens of derelict containers, and cars were washed out of the town hall's parking lot, hundreds of meters away. In addition, 29 fishing boats ranging from one to five tons were sunk, washed away or stranded ashore.

However, Minoru Ebisawa of the Oarai Town Office reported some good news amid the devastation, which was that as soon as a quake warning issued by the Japan Meteorological Agency was received at the Town Office, evacuation orders were immediately given and expeditiously carried out. Most coastal communities did not order evacuations until a tsunami warning was issued, some 15 minutes later, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. Due to the diligence and dedication of Oarai's officials, the entire at-risk population was moved to higher ground and not one life was lost.

Ebisawa also explained that the cleanup was made possible by the efforts of more than 100 maintenance and construction workers, along with their equipment and machinery, and more than 150 town employees — all of whom worked as volunteers.

Fishing for the facts

In 2010, for which data from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures has not been made available, mackerels were by a big margin the leading species landed by Japanese fishermen, with 420,000 tons, followed by skipjack tuna (274,000 tons), Alaska pollock (235,000 tons) and the various types of squid (225,000 tons).

In terms of sources, marine fisheries accounted for 3.659 million tons, followed by marine aquaculture (934,000 tons), inland fisheries (40,000 tons) and inland aquaculture (39,000 tons).

In 2009, the Tohoku region of northeast Honshu accounted for 22 percent of all Japan's marine fishery production (including 38 percent of the mackerel catch and 48 percent of the squid), as well as 18 percent of its aquaculture — especially oysters, kelp and *wakame* seaweed.

On Sept. 12, several mid-water trawlers came in with catches of whitebait (*shirasu*) — actually 2- to 3-month-old sardines — which easily passed radiation tests carried out by officials from Ibaraki prefectural government. The whitebait registered 3 becquerels/kg from radioactive cesium — the legal maximum was 500 becquerels/kg — and showed no traces of radioactive iodine. In 2012, the national government lowered the legal maximum to 100 becquerels/kg for all fish and seafood.

However, Akinobu Usuniwa of Japan Fisheries Agency Oarai, pointed out that whereas 5,000 tons of fish worth ¥800 million were landed at Oarai in 2010, landings in the four months from April to July 2011 were down by 40 percent.

But whereas Oarai is more than 100 km from the explosions and three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant that followed the March 11 quake and tsunami, the fishing port of Otsu to the north of Oarai in Ibaraki Prefecture is less than 100 km distant. There, as Joh Murayama of the Otsu Fishery Cooperative told this writer, the port's entire fishery was shut down due to concerns over radiation.

Notwithstanding such calamities, though, Japan's fishing community appeared determined to make 2012 a year of positive energy. In consequence, a new world record for the most expensive fish sale was set on Thursday, Jan. 5, in the first tuna auction of the new year at Tokyo's Tsukiji Wholesale Fish Market when bidding finally stopped for a 269-kg Pacific bluefin tuna (*Thunnus orientalis*), known in Japanese as *hon maguro* (true tuna) or *kuro maguro* (black tuna).

That fish came from the Tsugaru Strait, which separates Japan's main island of Honshu from the northern island of Hokkaido. It was caught by a hook-and-line fisherman from Oma on the Shimokita Peninsula at Honshu's most northerly point — a famed tuna port that also provided world-record-breaking new-year fish in 2001 and 2010.

The record-breaking specimen was bought by Kiyoshi Kiyomura, the president of Kiyomura Company, which owns and operates a restaurant chain named Sushi Zanmai in Tsukiji and elsewhere in Tokyo. The selling price was ¥56,490,000 (\$736,000), which represents ¥210,000 per kg (\$1,238 per lb). That astronomical amount eclipsed by far the previous record of ¥32.49 million (¥95,000 per kg [\$526 per lb]) set at 2011's new-year sale for a giant 342-kg Pacific bluefin tuna caught in the Tsugaru Strait by longline fishermen out Toi Port in Hokkaido.

Insiders at Tsukiji expressed satisfaction that the tuna was purchased by one of their own. They also hoped the excitement generated by the transaction would help dispel the negative effect of radiation fears and rumors that have seen importers in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan boycotting Japanese seafood products.

So damaging has this been that in February 2012 the Japan Fisheries Association, which was founded in 1882 and has a membership of several hundred companies and fisheries organizations, reported that the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations delivered a resolution to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization calling on it "to help eliminate rootless negative rumors on seafood from the eastern and northern areas of Japan severely affected by the great earthquake and tsunami in March 2011." The resolution went on to say that: "Despite safety of fish guaranteed by the Japanese authorities

concerned through monitoring and inspections, sales of the seafood have decreased drastically due to rootless negative rumors." [????]

Part of the problem, according to investigative crime reporter Jake Adelstein, author of the 2009 best-seller "Tokyo Vice," is that most Japanese media unconditionally accepted and "parroted" misinformation put out by the national government and the stricken nuclear plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco), concerning the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns. Adelstein cited the Sankei Shimbun and Chunichi Shimbun newspapers as exceptions.

While the recovery, reconstruction and rebuilding of fishing communities, ports and boats is a monumental challenge, the ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant poses a potentially greater threat to Japan's fishery.

That's particularly because the rich Joban Oki fishing ground, where the cold Oyashio Current from sub-arctic Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands meets the warm Kuroshio Current from sub-tropical Okinawa is located from just offshore to more than 300 nautical miles out to sea in the North Pacific off Fukushima. High levels of radioactive materials in the ocean and on the seabed have forced the closure of fisheries for valuable groundfish such as flounder (*hirame*), sole (*karei*) and anglerfish (*anko*), as well as shellfish including abalone (*awabi*), crab (*kani*) and clams (*asari*). On April 5, 2011, the government of Ibaraki Prefecture banned fishing for sand lance (*ikanago*) due to levels of radioactive cesium above the legal levels — so marking the first shutdown of a Tohoku fishery. Many more were to follow.

Meanwhile the Japan Fisheries Agency branch of the national government has set up an inspection protocol for migratory pelagic species which pass by the Tohoku coast.

Salmon (*sake*) are inspected for radioactivity in August and September in Hokkaido and in October and November in Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. Mackerel (*saba*) are inspected from April through June at two locations in Ibaraki Prefecture, and from July through September in Aomori Prefecture — and again in Ibaraki in November and December. Pacific saury (*sanma*) are inspected in August and September in Hokkaido, October and November in Fukushima and November and December in Ibaraki. In addition, skipjack crossing the Joban Oki, which formerly produced 30 percent of Japan's marine fish, are inspected in the Kuroshio Current in May and June and in the Oyashio Current from July through September.

Then finally, on June 25, 2012, a real breakthrough to justify that Tsukiji auction's battling spirit came when 295 kg of octopus (*tako*), caught in the coastal Fukushima Prefecture sector of the Joban Oki were landed at the port of Soma, marking the first time in 15 months that deliveries of seafood were made in Fukushima. The octopi were virtually free of radiation and were shipped to retail stores in Soma, where

most of the product was quickly bought by consumers. Then, on July 21, octopus from Fukushima was at last sold outside the prefecture for the first time, in neighboring Miyagi.

Surely now, the future for Japan's fisheries, and those out of Tohoku ports in particular, are beginning to look increasingly brighter with each passing month — though there's no disguising the fact that any return to pre-March 11, 2011, normalcy is still many years in the future.

Are fireworks unsafe?

September 17, 2012

Fukushima fireworks return to festival after cancellation over radiation fears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120917p2a00m0na006000c.html>

NISSHIN, Aichi -- A festival using fireworks produced in nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture was held here on Sept. 16, a year after their launch was canceled due to radiation fears.

Some 80 fireworks balls made in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Kawamata were shot off into the night sky of Nisshin, Aichi Prefecture, prompting many spectators to pray for the early recovery of disaster-hit areas.

In September last year, the organizing committee of the festival canceled the launch of fireworks produced in Kawamata, saying, "There is no solid data indicating their safety." The decision sparked some 3,000 calls of protest and other complaints. Later that month, the organizing committee measured the radiation dosage of Kawamata-produced fireworks and confirmed their safety, subsequently deciding to set them off at the next festival and keeping 80 of the balls in Aichi Prefecture.

The city of Nisshin and the village of Kawamata have since strived to deepen their exchanges, such as Nisshin dispatching its employees to Kawamata. At this year's festival, four more Kawamata-produced fireworks balls were added to the total of 2,000 balls shot off into the sky.

"Thank you for your support," Kawamata Mayor Michio Furukawa said in addressing the crowd at a lighting ceremony for the festival.

Not enough children in Fukushima schools

September 18, 2012

School authorities near Fukushima nuclear plant struggle to get students back home

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120918p2a00m0na012000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- School authorities near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are struggling to get children back to their schools so that they can lead future reconstruction efforts.

Officials in charge of education in municipalities near the tsunami-devastated nuclear power station in Fukushima Prefecture earnestly say, "We want them to be aware of their hometowns and play a role in reconstruction." They are desperately holding events and taking other measures to gather children spread across the country in an effort to persuade them to return to their schools. However, the officials are faced with difficult challenges such as the fact that many children are reluctant to return because they have already comfortably settled in areas where they took refuge.

At a hotel in Koriyama in August this year, there was a two-day and one-night event for a "reunion" for 226 children who do or who had planned to attend one of two public Tomioka junior high schools. The Tomioka Municipal Government had tried to look for a place to build a temporary school, but the abolished school that had been suggested was too far away and building a school on farmland recommended for possible use was banned. The local government eventually decided to build a temporary school on an old factory site in the neighboring town of Miharu in June 2011, and the school reopened there in September the same year. Fujio Shono, superintendent of Tomioka schools, said, "We were scolded by guardians who asked us why we didn't reopen the school early. I want children to connect with their friends and firmly believe that Tomioka is their hometown."

A third-year junior high school boy, 14, who evacuated to Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, said, "There are circumstances such as my parents' work. I think I will graduate from the school I go to now." A mother of a 13-year-old boy, who is a second-year student at a public junior high school in Iwaki, said, "When his old school reopened, he had already become used to his new school."

Meanwhile, there are schools where the number of students has rebounded. At Naraha public schools, whose temporary classrooms are based in Iwaki, 30 students returned in the summer of this year and 30 more are expected to come back sometime between next January and the spring of next year. The Naraha municipal board of education says it will be able to improve its educational environment, stressing the fact that the temporary school the local government is currently building in Iwaki will be used from the third term of this current school year.

A 50-year-old male public servant has brought his 15-year-old son, a third-year junior high school student, from a school in Aizumisato, where they took shelter, to the Naraha public junior high school that he originally attended. He said he had brought his son back mainly because his baseball team activities were over, adding, "The temporary school (in Iwaki) was also a reason for that decision." He went on to say, "There are many people who are agonizing over which school they should choose."

Number of children at public schools near Fukushima nuclear plant halved: Mainichi survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120918p2a00m0na013000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The number of children at public elementary and junior high schools in 10 municipalities near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has dropped by half from what it was before the outbreak of the nuclear crisis in March 2011, according to a survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun.

At schools in four of the 10 municipalities which reopened in the summer of 2011 or later, the number of students dropped to less than 20 percent of what it would have been if the nuclear accident had not occurred, apparently reflecting the fact that those children who had already managed to settle in places where they evacuated did not return to schools in their hometowns. School authorities in these areas have been working hard to try to have children and their parents turn their attention to their hometowns because young people are indispensable in the planned reconstruction of the disaster-stricken region.

Of the 12 municipalities designated by the central government as evacuation zones or planned evacuation zones, the Mainichi Shimbun conducted a survey on 10 of them, excluding Futaba and Katsurao where all schools have been closed since the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, and compared the number of children who would have been enrolled in schools in the municipalities in April 2011 if the nuclear accident had not had happened with the actual number of children enrolled in the schools as of August 2012.

The number of school children in Namie, Tomioka, Hirono, Naraha and Kawauchi dropped to less than 20 percent of what it would have been if the nuclear accident had not happened. Of those municipalities, the reopening of public elementary and junior high schools in Tomioka, Namie and Hirono was delayed until August and October last year and the reopening of schools in Naraha was put off until April this year.

Public elementary and junior high schools in Tomioka reopened on an old factory site in Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture, but the number of students there dropped to 75, or five percent of what it was before the nuclear disaster. Of a total of nine public elementary and junior high schools in Namie, only one elementary school and one junior high school reopened in Nihonmatsu and the number of children at those schools stood at 79, a mere five percent of what it was before the nuclear disaster. The number of students at public elementary and junior high schools in Hirono, which started classes at their original location in August this year after temporarily reopening in Iwaki, dropped to less than 20 percent of what it was before the nuclear accident. The number of students at schools in Naraha, which continued to hold classes in Iwaki, dropped to 20 percent of what it was before the nuclear accident.

Public elementary and junior high schools in six other municipalities reopened at formerly shut-down schools and other places in other municipalities in April last year. The number of school children in Minamisoma stood at 50 percent of what it was before the nuclear disaster after dropping to 30 percent at one point. According to the city board of education, there were districts in the city where radiation levels were relatively low, and therefore schools there were able to reopen early.

Many people from Iitate, which was designated as a planned evacuation zone, have been living in temporary housing units in its neighboring town of Kawamata, and 60 percent of school children remained enrolled in schools in the local municipality. In Tamura and Kawamata where radiation levels are relatively low, 90 percent of the children from the municipalities remained enrolled in their schools.

Okuma has been struggling with the declining number of school children although its schools were able to reopen in April 2011, shortly after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. The entire municipality, where the crippled nuclear power station is located, was designated as an evacuation zone. When elementary and junior high schools reopened in Aizuwakamatsu, 50 percent of students remained enrolled in the schools, but less than 40 percent of them remain with the schools now. Many residents of Okuma have been moving out of Fukushima Prefecture one after another because it remains unclear when they can go back home. An official of the town board of education said, "If things remain as they are, our reconstruction efforts will be gravely affected."

Taking care of Fukushima dead

September 24, 2012

Hopes and fears for the future as Fukushima families honor dead

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120924p2a00m0na018000c.html>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- As people across Japan visited graves to honor the dead during the "higan" Autumnal Equinox, nuclear plant worker Masahiro Hiruta held up photos of the wife and daughter he lost to the tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.

"Watch over Fukushima's children and families from heaven, so that they'll never have to experience such disasters again," the 45-year-old man said, addressing his late family.

At the time of the quake, Hiruta was working at the No. 5 reactor of the now-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant as a contractor for the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO). A concrete wall crumbled, and he escaped outside. When the workers were dismissed an hour later, Hiruta headed to the home he shared with his wife and daughter in the city's Tairauso district. The landscape was filled with burnt homes and mountains of rubble.

The next morning, he found parts of his home by the edge of a mountain some 100 meters away from where his house had stood. His daughter Maria's body was found two days later, and his wife Grace's a week later. He says that makes him one of the luckier ones.

Hiruta met his wife at a hostess bar in Iwaki 20 years earlier. He respected her for sending money back to her eight siblings in the Philippines, and wanted to support her. The couple wed in May 1996, and had Maria in August 1998. Having lost his beloved wife and daughter, there are some questions Hiruta can't stop asking himself.

"What if I hadn't gotten married?" he asks. "What if I hadn't bought a house near the ocean?"

After the deaths of Grace and Maria, Hiruta learned from former classmates and other acquaintances how much they had been loved. That has helped him move forward.

"If I were to stay sad, it would make the two of them sad," he says. "I want to be able to leave the city a place where children can live with smiles on their faces."

Hiruta has begun helping out at soup kitchens at temporary housing facilities where his sister Mitsuko works. He's also been attending lectures with her on low-level radiation exposure and other issues. This spring, he planted a cherry tree on the grounds of the school his daughter used to attend in honor of his wife and daughter, who loved cherry blossoms. Says Hiruta: "The kids all tell me, 'Maria is here with us (where the tree is)'."

Hiruta says he can't go near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant anymore. The dangers of radiation have been burned into his mind. Soon, he hopes to start volunteering for decontamination work on roads used by students traveling to and from school.



People wearing shoe covers to protect themselves from radiation contamination are seen visiting their ancestors' graves in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha on Sept. 22 during the Autumnal Equinox, when Japanese Buddhists traditionally honor the dead. (Mainichi)

Changes have been seen in some areas contaminated with radioactive cesium from the stricken nuclear plant. In the prefectural town of Naraha, many residents visited the Dairakuin temple on Sept. 22 to honor their ancestors for the Autumnal Equinox.

With the Aug. 10 lifting of Naraha's no-go zone designation and its shift to the designation of a "zone being prepared for residents' return," residents have been able to enter the town freely. Many were seen visiting the graves of their ancestors, as well as their homes and communities. Still, residents have concerns.

"Even though we can come and go freely, we still can't live here," said Naraha resident Akira Kubota, 61, who looked across the temple where some tombstones were still in disarray. "I worry about who's going to take care of my family's grave from now on."

Boars and monkeys in no-entry zones

September 23, 2012

Japan to study wild animals in no-entry zone

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120923_09.html

Japan's Environment Ministry has decided to study wild animals in no-entry areas around the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in preparation for the return of residents in the future.

The decision follows a number of complaints about wild boars and monkeys from people who temporarily returned to their homes.

Scientists believe populations of boars and monkeys, which used to be hunted, increased and their habitats expanded after people left the areas following the nuclear accident last year.

The ministry plans to study habitat distributions of wild animals and seasonal changes in their activities from October to March, using cameras equipped with sensors.

Kato and the people who stayed behind

September 23, 2012

Documentary filmmaker Tetsu Kato portrays those who stayed after nuclear disaster



Film director and Aomori Prefecture resident Tetsu Kato. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120923p2a00m0na003000c.html>

There's the old man who walks the hills picking wild grasses, making medicine out of them. There's also the man living deep in the mountains alone after his wife's death, making local rice wine, and the couple staying in a hippie village from the 1970s, raising chickens.

It's these people who remained in the Fukushima villages of Iitate and Kawauchi -- both designated as no-go zones by the national government after the onset of a nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami -- on whom 60-year-old director Tetsu Kato chose to shine the spotlight in the first installment of his documentary film "Fukushima kara no Kaze" (Winds from Fukushima).

"I wanted to portray who these appealing people were in reality without thinking about a dramatic component," he says.

The stars of the film, who were as natural in front of the camera as they were elsewhere, had an uncommon take on the nuclear disaster.

"We aren't victims. From nature's standpoint, we (humans) are all perpetrators," one said.

"We have to stop complaining and learn that this is the real nature of a national government," another said.

In the last few moments of the film, a deserted forest and fields appear against the backdrop of the Spanish classical guitar piece "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" (Memories of Alhambra). Says Kato, "I superimposed my wish for the world to return to one in which people can live in onto the song."

When Kato arrived in Tokyo from the Shizuoka Prefecture city of Numazu at the age of 19 to attend Hosei University, the school was in the clutches of leftist student violence. "I just couldn't deal with it, so I left to travel alone on my bicycle," he recalls.

He spent two years visiting agricultural communities including Atarashiki-mura, an intentional community in Saitama Prefecture. Through his travels, Kato says, "I realized I wanted to create a world that was not limited by money or time, by changing the way we live our lives, not through student activism."

After portraying farmers in his 2002 film "Denshin yugaku" about farmers living near the Rokkasho nuclear reprocessing plant in Aomori Prefecture, Kato himself took up farming. Prefacing with the disclaimer that "raising consciousness" might sound presumptuous, Kato explains the reason he, now a farmer, still continues to make films as this: "I want to leave behind an opportunity for the next generation to think about how they live."

Kato is now working on a sequel based in the disaster areas during the winter.

Food contamination update

September 25, 2012

FYI

Cesium contamination in food appears to be on wane

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120925i1.html>

By MIZUHO AOKI

Staff writer

It's been 18 months since the Fukushima nuclear disaster contaminated much of the prefecture and beyond, and reports are still coming in about radiation in food exceeding the government limit.

Vote of support: Octopus caught off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture are displayed in a supermarket in the Ueno district in Tokyo on Aug. 2. The sign hanging from the shelf voices support for Fukushima produce and includes a test result indicating the seafood on display has no detectable radioactive cesium.

KYODO



In late August, Tokyo Electric Power Co. announced that heavily contaminated "ainame" (greenlings) had been caught in the Pacific within 20 km of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant. Earlier this month, sweet chestnuts from Tochigi Prefecture were found tainted with cesium beyond the government's limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram.

Is it too early to stop being concerned about eating fish, meat and vegetables grown by Fukushima and neighboring areas?

Here is the latest update on food safety regarding the meltdowns in Fukushima:

Have any changes been observed in contamination levels?

Overall, the data indicate food contamination has dropped over the past year. Health ministry data show that radiation from cesium has not been detectable in most vegetables declared unsafe last year.

This trend is the same with beef. This is good news because last year excessive cesium levels were found in beef that had already been sold. The radiation is believed to have come from tainted rice straw fed to the cattle.

The agriculture ministry meanwhile says local governments are checking all beef before it goes to market. Only three out of the 58,460 beef samples tested have exceeded the government ceiling since April, when stricter limits for radioactive cesium were imposed on food, officials said.

The crisis has been kinder to pork and chicken, with only one pork sample from Fukushima exceeding the limit since the crisis started, the agriculture ministry says.

Between April 1 and Sept. 19, local governments checked 105,913 food items, including beef and vegetables, according to the health ministry. Of those samples, 1,360 items, or 12 percent of the total, exceeded the limit for cesium. About half of the tainted samples originated in Fukushima Prefecture.

When produce is found to exceed the government limit, all of the same kind of produce grown in areas surrounding the source is banned from shipment until the radiation drops to within norms.

What types of food are showing excessive contamination?

Mainly food sourced from forests, rivers and lakes in the Tohoku and northern Kanto regions and from the Pacific Ocean. This includes mushrooms, mountain vegetables, wild game, freshwater fish and bottom fish.

Samples of Japanese tea and tea made from "yacon" leaves also shot through the ceiling this year.

Experts say radiation tends to be higher in the forests, where tainted leaves fall and contaminate the soil, tainting plants and any animals that feed on them.

Why is cesium still high in bottom fish?

This is hard to determine. Unlike the situation on land, where experts say they have a good idea how radioactive material goes through the food chain, its movement in marine produce is not yet understood.

For the most part, contamination of fish that live near the surface and at medium depths, like "konago" (sand lance), "mekajiki" (swordfish) and "masaba" (chub mackerel), has declined along with the dropping levels of cesium in the waters they inhabit, according to Fisheries Agency data.

But bottom fish, such as "hirame" (flounder) caught off Fukushima, Ibaraki, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, have been found with too much cesium. The same with "madara" (cod) caught off Aomori Prefecture — some 400 km north of the crippled power plant.

"Suzuki," or sea bass, has also been found above the government limit.

Takashi Ishimaru, a professor of ocean sciences at Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, said bottom fish are apparently being contaminated by benthos, the tiny organism they eat. When waste and plankton carcasses tainted with radiation sink to the seabed, they are eaten by the bottom-feeding organisms, which in turn are eaten by bottom fish, he said.

Keeping a close watch: Officials on Sept. 12 check bags of rice for radiation in the town of Aizubange, Fukushima Prefecture. The circle on the screen indicates that no radioactive materials were detected. KYODO



Ishimaru said it will take "much, much more time" before all fish near the coast of Fukushima are free of contamination.

Commercial fishing near Fukushima Prefecture has been voluntarily banned since March, but it resumed in June with two types of octopus and one kind of shellfish. Seven more species followed in September.

They are "kegani" (hairy crab), "kichiji" (marbled rockfish), three types of shellfish — "chijimiezobora," "ezoboramodoki" and "nagabai" — and two types of squid named "surumeika" and "yariika." Cesium accumulates far less in these mollusks, experts say.

What about rice? Is there any risk of tainted rice slipping through the tests like last year in Fukushima?

Learning its lesson from last year, when tainted rice was found in Fukushima Prefecture after Gov. Yuhei Sato declared its grain safe, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is checking all rice harvested this year before distribution. About 360,000 tons of it is expected to be harvested in Fukushima this year.

As of last Thursday, the prefecture had checked 31,354 standard 30-kg bags of rice and found all within the radiation limit. Tested rice is tagged with an "inspected" mark bearing a QR, or quick response, code so consumers can check its cesium level.

Is the central government taking any measures to double-check food safety?

Yes. The health ministry, without notifying vendors, is purchasing food from supermarkets and over the Internet to run spot checks.

The ministry says it checked 699 items between April 1 and Aug. 31, and found a package of mulberry leaf tea from Fukushima over the radiation limit.

Can we believe government data? Are there any other data that indicate contamination of food we are eating is low?

Co-op Fukushima has been examining cesium levels in meals cooked by Fukushima Prefecture residents and the results are showing a similar trend. Any cesium detected is usually very low, the consumer group says.

The co-op has performed the tests two times, with each round covering 100 households. The families prepare an additional setting for every meal over the course of two days for testing by the co-op. About 90 percent of the participating households used produce from Fukushima Prefecture in their meals.

Among the 100 households tested between November and March, radioactive cesium was detected in 10 meals. But the highest detected amount was 11.7 becquerels per kilogram, far below the government limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram.

Cesium levels in the second set of testing between June and August showed a similar trend. Of the 100 tested households, cesium was detected in meals from just two of the 82 households the co-op has been able to confirm data from so far.

The highest amount was a mere 3.2 becquerels per kilogram, it said.

If the family that made this meal ate the exact same one each day for a year, their total exposure to radioactive cesium would be 0.037 millisieverts, according to the co-op. By comparison, when someone is exposed to a cumulative dose of 100 millisieverts, the risk of dying from cancer goes up by 0.5 percent, according to many scientists.

Co-op Fukushima said it will continue to perform the tests and keep track of the contamination levels.

The Weekly FYI appears Tuesdays. Readers are encouraged to send ideas, questions and opinions to hodobu@japantimes.co.jp.

Lump-sum compensation from TEPCO

September 27, 2012

TEPCO to introduce lump-sum N-payments

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120926003846.htm>

Jiji Press

Tokyo Electric Power Co. will start accepting from Oct. 3 claims for lump-sum compensation payments to cover damage from the nuclear crisis at its crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

By starting lump-sum payments, TEPCO will help affected people put their lives back in order as swiftly as possible. The payments are scheduled to begin by the end of October, the power utility said Tuesday.

Claims for lump-sum payments can be made for damage suffered in June this year or after.

For instance, regarding compensation for psychological damage, currently set at 100,000 yen per person a month, people from areas where annual radiation doses exceed 50 millisieverts and entry is prohibited can receive five years' payments all at once.

"Reconstruction bases in low-radiation areas"

September 28, 2012

Panel advises to set up communities outside Namie

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120928_41.html

A panel has proposed to set up new resident communities outside Namie Town in northeastern Japan within 18 months, as it expects the town's reconstruction to take about 5 years.

Namie Town in Fukushima Prefecture was declared no-entry and evacuation zones after the nuclear accident in March last year. All of its approximately 20,000 residents are now living in other parts of the country.

A panel of experts and residents began discussing rehabilitation steps for the town in June. It compiled the town's first such plan, and submitted it to Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba on Friday.

The panel says reconstruction will take about 5 years. It also says that priority should be put on rebuilding infrastructure, and **setting up reconstruction bases in low-radiation areas.**

It also recommends the establishment of public housing in about 3 sites, such as Minami Soma City, Iwaki City and other candidate municipalities, where many of Namie's residents want to live.

Mayor Baba says he wants to begin explaining the plan to residents as soon as possible.

The town will submit the proposal for debate to an extraordinary session of the town assembly next month.

Free medical care for Fukushima youth

October 2, 2012

More Fukushima kids get free medical care

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121001003222.htm>

FUKUSHIMA--A free medical care system for people aged 18 or younger started Monday in Fukushima Prefecture, a policy aimed at encouraging residents with children to stay in the prefecture hit hard by the nuclear crisis.

This is the first time a prefectural government has made medical fees free for people under 19 years old.

The crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has made many residents with small children fearful about staying.

At Ichikawa Clinic in Fukushima, about 60 appointments--nearly double the usual number--had been made as of 9 a.m. when the clinic opened.

Children up to the third grade of middle school were eligible for free medical care under the city's previous system, but this has now been expanded.

Mima Endo, a 36-year-old farmer, brought her 3-year-daughter to the clinic. Endo said she realized the new system would really start when she last week received her daughter's qualification certificate, which is valid until March 31, 2027.

"I think this will support people who decide to stay in Fukushima," she said.

Food contamination - Apparent improvement

September 30, 2012

Survey: 1 percent of food samples exceeded radioactive limit

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201209300031>

Even with newer stricter standards for radioactive materials in food, only about 1 percent of food samples tested by the central and local governments in the past six months have failed to clear the screening, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed on Sept. 30.

“The spread of (radioactive) contamination is receding,” a health ministry official concluded.

The new permissible standards for radioactive contamination stipulate that the upper limit of radioactive cesium in food is 100 becquerels per kilogram. The corresponding figure for baby food and milk is 50 becquerels, while drinking water is 10 becquerels.

In the inspections that had been conducted until March, the permissible standards had been 500 becquerels per kilogram. The corresponding figure for drinking water, milk and dairy products had been 200 becquerels.

Since the new standards were introduced in April this year, the central and local governments have inspected about 114,000 food samples by the end of September. Of these, 1,394 samples, or about 1 percent, contained more radioactive materials than allowed under those standards.

Many of the samples were those of fishery products and mushrooms, the survey said. As a result, shipment of a total of 108 food items was banned in 10 prefectures by the central government. Those food items were mainly fishery items and mushrooms.

None of the baby food and milk samples have contained more radioactive materials than the new standards.

The samples that were subject to inspection were mainly food items that had been found to contain more than 50 becquerels of radioactive materials in the past. If new standards were used in March 2012, about 2 percent of the samples would have exceeded the limit of 100 becquerels.

Immediately after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, radioactive materials that were scattered from the plant and fell from the sky spread the contamination. At present, radioactive cesium that has accumulated in the ground or sea is a major source of contamination.

Food sampling whose radioactive contamination have exceeded the permissible standards are centering on certain items, such as fishery products or mushrooms, which easily retain radioactive materials because of difficulties in managing their feed or soil.

All of those fishery products are demersal fish, such as flatfish and Pacific cod, and river fish, including char. Demersal fish are bottom feeders that readily take cesium from their feed. River fish characteristically have difficulty in discharging cesium from their bodies.

Food items whose samples contained more radioactive materials than the new permissible standards are not distributed to retailers because producers are imposing voluntary restraints on their shipments or the central government is instructing them to suspend their shipment.

One of the conditions for lifting the directive is that all of the samples of the item contain less radioactive materials than the new standards in an inspection done during the previous month.

As fish and wild animals move around, however, it is more difficult to evaluate their food safety than vegetables.

“We cannot set clear standards for them,” said a health ministry official in charge of the issue.

During the period from April to August, there were 14 cases in which food that had been already distributed were found to contain more radioactive materials than the standards.

Food inspections by the central and local governments are mainly conducted on pre-shipment products. The number of products that are inspected after being distributed is much smaller.

As for products that have been already distributed, the central government has inspected only about 100 samples per month. None of the distributed products inspected by the central government have found to be containing more radioactive materials than the new standards.

Meanwhile, anxieties that spread among consumers immediately after the Fukushima nuclear accident are gradually subsiding.

Kiyokazu Ujiie, assistant professor of food consumption analysis at the University of Tsukuba’s graduate school, asked married women in the Tokyo metropolitan area in June if they knew the new permissible standards. Twenty-two percent said that they knew the contents of the new standards and 63 percent replied that they had heard of them.

Asked whether they would buy spinach that was produced in Fukushima Prefecture but contained less radioactive materials than the standards, 41 percent replied they would not buy it at any price. The figure was a decrease of 6 points from February.

On the other hand, those who said that they will buy the spinach if the price is 10 to 50 yen (13 to 64 cents) cheaper than that produced in other prefectures stood at 32 percent. It marked an increase of eight points from February.

“Thanks to the introduction of the stricter standards, consumers’ evaluations of agricultural products produced in Fukushima Prefecture have apparently improved,” Ujiie said.

October 2, 2012

Less radioactive cesium found in food items as decontamination work progresses

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121002p2a00m0na003000c.html>



A customer shops at a store called "Catalog House no Mise," which sells vegetables produced in Fukushima Prefecture, in Minato Ward, Tokyo. The results of cesium tests on those vegetables are displayed above the price tags. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

Lower levels of radioactive cesium exceeding government-set standards were found in food items tested by local municipalities over the past six months thanks apparently to progress in decontamination work on farm land, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said.

The announcement came as Oct. 1 marked half a year since the government tightened standards for radioactive materials contained in food items in April, from 500 becquerels per kilogram to 100 becquerels. Among 113,509 food items that were inspected by municipalities by the end of September, 1,394 items, or 1.2 percent, were found to contain cesium exceeding the new criteria.

Of those 1,394 cesium-tainted food items, 735 items were marine products, while most of the remaining items included mushrooms, wild vegetables, and wild animal and bird meat. Vegetables and fruit accounted for 1 percent or less among the contaminated items.

Along with the reduced food contamination, harmful rumors that discourage customers from buying products from nuclear disaster-affected areas have relatively subsided compared to last year.

In 2011, levels of cesium detected in peaches produced in Fukushima Prefecture did not exceed the then provisional standard of 500 becquerels per kilogram, but their prices plunged to half those in normal years. JA Date Mirai, a Japan Agricultural Cooperatives' branch in the prefectural city of Date, decontaminated orchards through such measures as debarking 37,000 orchard trees. The prices for peaches produced this year bounced back to 80 to 90 percent of normal levels. A 31-year-old JA Date Mirai official in charge of peaches, however, said, "The shipment volume has not recovered yet, and we are still uncertain about our future."

A store in front of JR Shinbashi Station in Tokyo, called "Catalog House no Mise," has been selling agricultural products from Fukushima to support the region's recovery. The store has set its own standards of 40 becquerels per kilogram and displays the results of radioactive tests on products. Some customers asked about the test method last year, but the store now enjoys an increase in the number of regular customers. A 38-year-old female company employee from Tokyo, who visited the store for the first time, said, "I can buy goods at ease because they display the test results. Recently, I have come to feel that I don't have to worry more than necessary."

Aeon Co. also conducts voluntary inspections on products and sells only items whose levels of radioactive cesium are below the measurable limits of 10 to 15 becquerels. The company says that sales of agricultural products from the Tohoku region have been recovering but that consumers are still feeling insecure about seafood.

Most of the fish species whose levels of cesium tend to exceed the standards are coastal bottom fish, including slime flounder and flatfish. Cesium is hardly detected in sand eel and other types of fish that inhabit near the sea surface off Fukushima Prefecture. Levels of cesium detected in such invertebrate animals as squid and octopus are below the measurable limits.

According to surveys by the Fisheries Agency and other organizations, cesium has hardly been detected in seawater lately. Toyoji Kaneko, professor at the University of Tokyo, says that fish take in cesium from their mouths and excrete it from their gills, while invertebrate animals have skins permeable to seawater and their bodies' cesium concentration declines as the seawater is purified. Bottom fish, meanwhile, eat bottom feeders and are therefore apt to take in cesium that has accumulated on the seabed.

A survey by the Fukushima Prefectural Government's fisheries experiment station found that the cesium concentration in marine products caught off the prefecture, excluding areas within 20 kilometers from the crippled nuclear plant, has been on the decline since July last year. "The cesium concentration in bottom fish will also decrease gradually," the manager of the station said.

Not enough nurses and health workers

October 3, 2012

Fukushima faces serious shortage of nurses after nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121003p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Fukushima Prefecture faces a serious shortage of nurses and health workers, due largely to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has emerged.

The Fukushima Nursing Association said that as of the end of August, **the number of unfilled jobs was 4.41 times higher than the number of applicants.** The number of young people receiving checkups is expected to increase in line with the Oct. 1 launch of a system providing free medical care to people aged 18 or under, and the association remains concerned about the situation, which could hinder health checks, saying a shortage of people in the medical profession could impede local restoration efforts.

Association officials said that in February 2011, the month before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture, there were 216 applications for 366 jobs, representing a job opening-to-application ratio of 1.69.

At the end of August this year, there were 768 job openings -- a huge increase compared with before the disaster -- while the number of applicants fell to 174, lifting the ratio to 4.41

Since the disaster, the number of job applicants has remained steady, at about 160 to 170 people a month, but the number of job openings has continued to increase. **The biggest reason for this is that nurses with children have evacuated out of the prefecture due to fears about the effects of radiation.** And since the disaster, parties outside the prefecture have lured away many nurses and other medical workers.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, the number of nurses and other workers at hospitals in the prefecture totaled 14,556 on March 1, 2011, shortly before the disaster. But on March 1 this year, the figure stood at 14,089.

Since the number of patients has increased as people's evacuation period is prolonged, medical staff have been overworked, and it is said there has been no end to the departure of workers.

Housing has also proved a problem. One nurse who wanted to return from Tokyo to work in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki was told that there was a waiting list of 200 people for an apartment, so she gave up on returning to work.

The Fukushima Nursing Association sought nurses and other medical workers from around the nation and 36 applied, but due to a lack of housing and other problems, only seven have been able to start working.

The disaster-hit prefectures of Iwate and Miyagi have also faced shortages of medical workers, but the situation has been particularly bad in Fukushima Prefecture due to the nuclear disaster, and it is expected to continue for a long time.

"The shortage of regular nurses and health nurses was an issue even before the disaster, but since the nuclear disaster, the situation has gotten unusually serious," said Midori Suzuki, a senior director of the Fukushima Nursing Association. "I want the government to widen its awareness of what is hindering restoration."

Stress ulcers in Fukushima people

October 6, 2012

Stress alone caused ulcers after 3.11 disasters: study

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121006p2a00m0na015000c.html>

SENDAI -- Peptic ulcers in some patients in Miyagi Prefecture were caused solely by stress from the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, a study has found.

A group of researchers from Tohoku University Hospital found that the percentage of people in the prefecture whose ulcers were believed to have been caused by stress alone rose from 13 percent before the quake to 24 percent after.

"It's known that ulcer patient numbers increase due to stress from wars and other such events, but this is the first time that we've found out that stress alone produces ulcers," said Katsunori Iijima, a member of the research group.

Researchers examined ulcer patient statistics at seven hospitals in Miyagi Prefecture including Ishinomaki Red Cross Hospital, before and after the March 11, 2011 disaster.

The number of patients with ulcers rose from 261 in 2010 to 383 after the disasters. Ulcers are usually associated with *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria or drugs such as aspirin. However, among the patients observed by researchers, the ratio of patients who were not infected with *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria and had not taken medication rose from 13 percent before the disasters to 24 percent afterwards.

The cause of the ulcers in these patients was deemed to be "unknown," but a member of the research group commented, "It's conceivable that the patients developed them without bacterial infections or other such causes, as they were exposed to extreme stress from the disaster."

The number of ulcer patients peaked 10 days after the quake and tsunami. Iijima said that patients with ulcers also increased after the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, but most of those patients had been infected with *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria. Up until now, it was believed that stress caused ulcers to increase in people who were already infected with the bacteria, but the latest results suggest stress alone can produce ulcers.

"We need to prepare acid-suppressing medication for future disasters so that cases don't worsen," Iijima said.

The group's research was published in the online edition of the *Journal of Gastroenterology*.

New course on reconstruction

October 5, 2012

Fukushima univ. launches disaster recovery course

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121005_29.html

Fukushima University has launched a course on reconstruction after the March 11th disaster and nuclear accident.

The course is aimed at boosting students' concern about and knowledge of the recovery of disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture.

The university is inviting nuclear decontamination and other experts as lecturers. One is involved in measuring radiation.

In the first lecture on Friday, Professor Mitsuo Yamakawa talked about how Fukushima was damaged and what challenges lie ahead. Yamakawa was involved in planning the reconstruction.

He said rebuilding infrastructure such as roads and houses is definitely important, but that the most crucial thing is creating bonds among and jobs for disaster victims.

A student from Tokyo said she's taking the course to think about how she can help with the recovery.

1st outdoor event in Kawauchi since 3/11

October 6, 2012

Fukushima school holds 1st sports event in 2 years

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121006_13.html

An elementary school in a village in Fukushima Prefecture has held an outdoor sporting event for the first time since last year's nuclear disaster.

The sporting event took place at Kawauchi elementary school in Kawauchi Village on Saturday.

The village is around 20 kilometers from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. After the accident in March 2011, most of its residents left. The children also moved out.

In April of this year, one year after the evacuation, the village decided to resume classes at Kawauchi.

Of the 114 students originally enrolled in the school, only 16 have returned to date.

But on Saturday, many students and parents who left the village came back for the sporting event.

Amid cheers, they participated in running events and a tug-of-war.

"Koshihikari" rice from Fukushima OK?

October 10, 2012

Rice shipments resume from Fukushima town once designated evacuation zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121010p2a00m0na002000c.html>

HIRONO, Fukushima -- Shipments of rice grown in this nuclear disaster-hit town resumed on Oct. 9, becoming the nation's first such shipments from a municipality once designated as an evacuation zone.

The rice will go on sale for customers in the Tokyo metropolitan area. The town had once been designated as an emergency evacuation preparation zone following the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March last year. But the designation was lifted in September that year.

Farmers in the town have been withholding from planting rice, but two farmers did not comply with requests for voluntary suspension. All 80 bags of "koshihikari" brand rice grown by the two farmers were tested for radioactive cesium on Oct. 9 and cleared the central government-set standard -- up to 100 becquerels per kilogram.

"We got more nervous than we were on the day of the earthquake (on March 11, 2011), but we're relieved now," said one of the two farming families, Ryohei Niitsuma, 53, and his 54-year-old wife, Masae, in the Oriki district of Hirono after passing the radiation screening.

Niitsuma started growing pesticide-free organic crops five years ago in the vast deserted farmland in Hirono, seeking a lifestyle not dependent on Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. He had acquired some 100 customers across Japan, most of whom were in the Tokyo metropolitan area. His 24-year-old son, Shuhei, had just returned to the town in 2010 to succeed farming.

"The nuclear disaster instantly destroyed our relationships of trust we had built over the years," fumed Niitsuma.

After the town was designated as an emergency evacuation preparation zone last year, Niitsuma went door to door visiting consumers. He was encouraged by those who told him, "Hang in there," and "Why not evacuate to our home?" He eventually decided to continue farming.

Last summer, he removed the topsoil of his paddies and planted rice. This spring, he spread potassium and zeolite -- chemical fertilizers that are used to prevent crops from taking up cesium -- before planting "koshihikari" rice over a 1.5-hectare patch of his paddies.

Imperial Couple will visit Fukushima no-go zone

October 10, 2012

Japan's Imperial Couple to visit village near crippled nuke plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121010b4.html>

Kyodo

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko on Saturday will visit a village that lies partially in the no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to encourage residents living in temporary housing and inspect radiation decontamination work.

The Imperial Household Agency said Tuesday the one-day trip to Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, is **part of the Imperial Couple's efforts to encourage people in areas near the nuclear plant** that was crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

All 3,000 residents of Kawauchi evacuated in the face of the nuclear crisis, but around 500 returned in late January. Around 90 villagers remain in temporary housing because their homes are within 20 km of the plant, and going back is prohibited.

The Emperor and Empress will visit a decontamination site where workers have cut away irradiated foliage around houses and washed the exterior walls and roofs of buildings, the agency said.

At a government-organized ceremony last March 11 to mark the first anniversary of the disaster, the Emperor referred to reconstruction of the areas around the nuclear power plant.

It will be the Imperial Couple's first trip to Fukushima Prefecture since May 11, 2011, when they visited the cities of Fukushima and Soma.

Steam train to restore tourism in disaster area

October 13, 2012

JR East plans excursions on restored steam train to promote tourism in disaster areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121013p2a00m0na003000c.html>

East Japan Railway Co. (JR East) has announced plans to launch excursions on a restored steam train in the disaster-stricken Tohoku region to help promote local tourism.

JR East will restore a C58 steam locomotive -- built in 1940 and currently on display in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture -- and model it after the train that appears in Kenji Miyazawa's novel, "Night on the Galactic Railroad." The locomotive will operate 80 days a year, mostly on weekends, primarily on the Kamaishi Line in Iwate Prefecture -- the novelist's hometown -- beginning in December next year at the earliest.

The firm will also remodel passenger carriages for the train, according to plans drawn up by industrial designer Kiyoyuki Okuyama in line with descriptions in the novel.

JR East will also introduce a special two-car excursion train painted with pictures of characters from popular anime "Pocket Monster" to the Ofunato Line between Ichinoseki in Iwate Prefecture and Kesenuma in Miyagi Prefecture on Dec. 22 this year.

The train will operate 160 days a year -- mainly on weekends, national holidays and summer and other holiday periods.



Passengers take photos of the special blue train at Yokohama Station on the JR Tokaido Line on Oct. 13. (Mainichi)

Both excursion trains are aimed at promoting tourism in Tohoku and helping the region recover from the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

In related news, on Oct. 13 a sleeper train, popularly known as a "blue train" because of its dark blue paint job, came out of retirement for a one-time run on the Tokaido Line between Tokyo and Hayakawa in Kanagawa Prefecture. A total of 140 people were on-board for the about 4.5-hour trip.

The last blue trains operated on the Tokaido Line -- the "Hayabusa" between Tokyo and Kumamoto, and the "Fuji" between Tokyo and Oita -- were abolished in March 2009. Only a few blue trains are still operating regularly on other routes, including the Hokutosei (The Big Dipper) sleeper limited express between Tokyo and Sapporo.

This year marks the 140th anniversary of Japan's first rail line between Shimbashi in Tokyo and Yokohama, which opened in October 1872.

Emperor visits Kawauchi

October 13, 2012

Emperor, Empress visit village near Fukushima Daiichi complex

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121013p2g00m0dm044000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko visited a village near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant on Saturday to meet with residents living in temporary housing and inspect decontamination work.

The one-day trip to Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, is in line with the Imperial couple's desire to provide encouragement to people in areas near the nuclear plant crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

After Kawauchi's entire population of 3,000 temporarily evacuated in the wake of the nuclear crisis, only some of the residents have since returned.

The Imperial couple observed decontamination work for some 60 houses and other places in one of the village's districts about 25 kilometers from the plant, asking some workers about contamination and expressing gratitude for their work.

They also visited around 90 residents living in temporary homes who evacuated from an area within a 20-km radius of the plant to which they remain prohibited from returning.

It is the couple's first visit to the prefecture since they traveled to the cities of Fukushima and Soma on May 11 last year.

Interesting results for rice farmers...and consumers

October 14, 2012

Farmer plows own antiradiation furrow

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20121014x1.html>

By TOMOKO OTAKE
Staff writer

At the end of March 2011, a few weeks after the Great East Japan Earthquake, 20 rice farmers affiliated to J-Rap, an agricultural distribution company in Sukagawa, central Fukushima Prefecture, got together to assess the situation.

Breaking new ground: Toshihiko Ito, head of the Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture-based agricultural company J-Rap, stands by one of its paddies where his innovative techniques appear to be succeeding in greatly reducing radiation in the rice. TOMOKO OTAKE



With no one seeming to have much idea what was really happening or what to expect next, the atmosphere was overwhelmingly gloomy, and many farmers were in despair over the prospects for producing any rice that year.

Heading up their concerns was the then unknown amount of radioactive material that had been and was still being released following explosions and three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Though winds had no doubt dispersed the contamination across massive swaths of eastern Japan, it seemed only logical to the farmers that their fields just 50 km southwest of the plant would have received a hefty dose — though back then, none of them had heard of iodine-131, cesium-134, cesium-137, microsieverts, becquerels or any of the radiation terminology they would soon grapple with.

But it wasn't just radiation they had to worry about, because the magnitude 9 earthquake on March 11 had damaged the area's irrigation systems, and many of them feared water supplies to their paddy fields would not be restored in time for the seedling planting season starting in May.

"Everyone was looking downcast," Toshihiko Ito, head of J-Rap, said of that first meeting at the company's Sukagawa base. In addition to 20 members present then, J-Rap also has 50 full-time farmers and 180 part-time farmers as members of the group, which specializes in no- or low-pesticide farming and whose members share agricultural equipment, a milling factory and a distribution network.

"They all said that, even if we went ahead and started production, nobody would buy our rice," recalled Ito, a 54-year-old Sukagawa native who set up J-Rap in 1993 after spending 16 years teaching farming knowhow at a local agricultural cooperative under the wing of the government-linked Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives (commonly referred to as JA).

Ito argued otherwise, eventually convincing the farmers to plant the seedlings as usual. "My stance was that I wanted to have as many seedlings as possible planted, since the more fields we worked on, the more diverse the data we got would be. And I thought such data would prove vital down the road."

It surely would. Some 19 months later, with the second harvesting season in post-disaster Fukushima now in full swing, Ito's group has defied the skeptics and succeeded in producing rice that is virtually free of radioactive substances despite most of the J-Rap farmers' fields being badly polluted by cesium-134 and cesium-137 spewed out of the nuclear power plant in vast quantities. With their long half-lives of two and 30 years, respectively, it is these radioisotopes that pose the biggest long-term health risk for Japan.

Separate from its chemical half-life, cesium-137 is particularly worrisome since it has a biological half-life of 70 to 120 days for adults — meaning that after being ingested with food or liquids, it takes that many days before half the amount is digested and excreted. Meanwhile, the remainder of the cesium-137 concentrates in muscles and organs, where it is widely believed to increase the likelihood of heart failure and strokes.

Last fall, Ito says his group managed to keep the level of cesium contamination in all of its rice products to 3.1 becquerels per kilogram — compared with the national government's provisional legal limit then of 500 becquerels per kilogram, which some Fukushima rice exceeded.

In April this year, however, the government changed its safety standard to 100 becquerels per kilogram for most foods, including meat, rice and vegetables, though it granted a six-month grace period for rice and beef producers — meaning that 500 becquerels per kilogram was the de facto legal limit for those products until just a few weeks ago.

Subject to these limits, the latest available data shows that, of the 119,438 samples tested for radiation by municipal governments across Japan from April 1 to Oct. 8, 1,489 — including mountain vegetables, mushrooms and flatfish — were found to exceed the government limit.

Meanwhile, based on tests of this season's harvest, which started in late September, **Ito says he hopes to bring the average cesium contamination across all J-Rap's brown rice down to half of last year's level — nearly 1/100th of the government limit.** He also claims that, when it's milled and eaten as white rice, the contamination will go down further.

In addition, all this season's rice shipped by Ito's company will be mixed, he said, to ensure a consistent cesium count across the board, and exclude luck or chance from the buyers' experience.

Reaping the sown: A combine harvester on one of 341 rice paddies managed by J-Rap.



If this is all as Ito claims, it will be some accomplishment, considering that few rice farmers in the nation, let alone Fukushima, can say their produce will contain a certain amount of cesium with that level of accuracy and clarity.

At present, when farmers say radiation is "nondetectable" in their rice, that may well be because the detectors they are using can't register radioactive emissions below 10 or 20 or 25 becquerels per kilogram. In addition, measurements also vary according to how long the specimen is exposed to detectors. Hence some producers and distributors may be claiming "nondetectable" levels of radiation in their produce if they are prioritizing testing throughout over accuracy.

In practice, though, the concerned consumer in Japan is left even more in the dark because a majority of domestic food producers don't publicize the results of radiation tests at all — or the frequency or the scale of their testing — but just blithely declare their fare is "within the government limit."

In contrast, what further sets Ito apart from most of the nation's other radiation-plagued farmers is his eagerness to seek advice from independent experts — especially antinuclear types with first-hand knowledge of what happened in the aftermath of the catastrophic 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

As Ito sees it, he can't do too much intelligence-gathering because he says he cannot hope to protect the health of the area's children, including his own two toddler grandchildren, by waiting for the government to respond to the crisis.

"What I really wanted to know was what the experts regretted most about their response to Chernobyl," he said. "I didn't care what theories or stances they had."

One expert he has turned to is molecular biologist Masaharu Kawata, a director of the Nagoya-based nonprofit, the Association to Help Chernobyl, Chubu-district, Japan. For the past 21 years, Kawata has offered technical advice to farmers in Ukraine, making visits there two to four times a year.

Since June 2011, Ito has been meeting Kawata once every month to draw on his knowhow and seek his advice on how to prevent rice plants from absorbing cesium. He has also spent long hours poring over papers written by Yuri Bandazhevsky, a pathologist in Belarus who has performed autopsies on children from the country's Gomel district that was heavily contaminated by radiation from Chernobyl.

Though the children had a variety of causes of death, Bandazhevsky found high levels of cesium-137 in their endocrine glands — in particular the thyroid, the adrenals and the pancreas — as well as in their hearts, thymuses and spleens. For his troubles, he was imprisoned for bribery from 2001-05 as what human-rights groups have termed a "prisoner of conscience."

Ito has also met and had discussions with Tetsuji Imanaka, a nuclear engineering expert at Kyoto University who was the first to translate the so-called "**Ukraine standards**" for radiation exposure into Japanese, and Akira Sugeno, the current mayor of Matsumoto City in Nagano Prefecture, who as a surgeon spent five years in Belarus from 1996 treating children with thyroid cancer.

Though it took until 11 years after the Chernobyl disaster to introduce them, in 1997 the government of Ukraine imposed the world's most stringent radiation-emission safety controls on food. As posted by Imanaka on the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute website, these include limits per kilogram for cesium-137 of 2 becquerels per kilogram for water, 20 for bread, 40 for root and leaf vegetables — except 60 for potatoes, 100 for milk and dairy products and 200 for meat.

In stark comparison, **the Japanese government's new legal limit per kilogram for a combined total of cesium-134 and cesium-137 is 10 becquerels for water, 40 for milk and baby food — and 100 for most other foods, including rice.**

However, based on his studies of Chernobyl and its ongoing aftermath, Ito says he decided as early as May last year that he would aim for J-Rap to satisfy the Ukraine standards for all the rice it produced and sold.

Safety first: A bag of J-Rap rice gets a mandatory prefectural radiation check.



Adopting such a stringent benchmark, he says, is essential to protect Fukushima's children as much as possible from internal exposure to radiation because, since March 2011, they have been externally exposed to much higher than normal levels.

In Sukagawa, for instance, which is less contaminated than many areas, airborne radiation readings that spiked to 1.96 microsieverts per hour on March 18, 2011, have gradually fallen to 0.1 to 0.8 microsieverts per hour, compared with pre-disaster levels of 0.04 to 0.06 microsieverts per hour, according to the city government.

Meanwhile, in the July after the disaster when he was loaned a gamma-ray spectrometer by Daichi-o-Mamoru-Kai, a Tokyo-based organic food distributor that buys rice from J-Rap, among many other producers, Ito began testing foods that the area's residents were eating. He then moved on to test the soil of the group's 341 standard-size, 30-by-100-meter rice fields covering a total of 97 hectares.

One of the first things Ito says he did, right after meeting with Kawata for the first time, was to sprinkle potassium fertilizers on the fields. That was because he had read a translated version of a research paper about an experiment in Sweden, a country widely contaminated by radiation from Chernobyl. There for 17 years from 1992, the application of potassium fertilizers was found to inhibit the uptake of cesium-137 by low-growing perennial shrubs and four types of wild fungi.

In addition, to also help prevent cesium from entering paddy fields, Kawata advised Ito to place bags of powdered zeolite at each one's irrigation sluice gate, as zeolites — which are aluminosilicate minerals commonly used as commercial absorbents — are known to bind well with cesium. "Zeolites have been reported in numerous scientific papers as being effective in absorbing cesium," he said.

Ever since receiving the gamma-ray spectrometer, Ito's group has been gathering data from every one of the 341 paddies on how cesium moved from the soil to the rice, testing not only rice grains, but also rice straw, husks, bran and embryo buds. They also compared cesium levels in milled white rice before and after it was cooked.

In addition, soil samples have been taken from six different spots in each paddy — four from near the corners and two from the other parts of the fields. Although Ito's tests showed very similar cesium levels in the corners (termed A points) and elsewhere (B points), he found that rice harvested from A points had much higher radiation levels than rice from B points. Ito says this might be because A points are not fully dosed with potassium fertilizers because the spreaders used do not reach them when they turn. Consequently, Ito has deduced that the potassium fertilizer does indeed help to keep cesium in the soil and prevent it being taken up by the rice plants.

Furthermore, by creating a contamination map based on all these figures and studying that along with aerial photographs of the area, Ito also realized that paddies close to woodland yield rice with much higher cesium levels than rice from other paddies, regardless of the soil's contamination levels.

"Rice contamination did not directly correspond with soil contamination," Ito points out. "Some fields whose soil had 4,000 becquerels per kilogram of radiation emissions from cesium produced brown rice with only 3 becquerel-per-kilogram emissions, while there was a case of brown rice grown on soil with 1,000 becquerels per kilogram of radiation ending up with emissions of 10 becquerels per kilogram."

Ito speculates it is water that accounts for the difference, as fields with a higher cesium uptake into the rice probably had "water contaminated with cesium from nearby woodlands mixing with rain water and flowing into them."

Then, last November, after all the rice was harvested, Ito had the top 15-centimeter layer of soil in all paddies plowed under and replaced with 15-cm of soil from below it. That was to bury the surface cesium just deep enough to keep it below the roots of the rice plants. This strategy, too, was based on a recommendation from Kawata, who told Ito that it had worked for Ukrainian vegetable farmers. As a valuable bonus, too, the plowing has also helped to lower the area's levels of airborne radiation.

"Plowing has been effective in reducing the amount of cesium in rice," Kawata said. "I think (Ito's group) has taken the necessary measures in the speediest manner possible."

However, Kawata is quick to warn farmers that **there is no room for complacency, since that the problem of cesium contamination is far from over.** In fact, he said his biggest concern at the moment is **cesium in the mountains**, which have been seriously tainted by the March 2011 fallout, he said. In addition, as fallen leaves decompose into leaf mold, they produce ammonia, which is easily dissolved in rainwater that may then seep into rivers and rice paddies. Ammonia is known to draw cesium from the soil and make it more absorbable by plants, he said.

Clean machine: J-Rap President Toshihiko Ito shows one of the firm's tractors fitted with a special Dutch-made cab designed to stop the driver having to inhale large amounts of dust while plowing or doing other tasks in fields contaminated with radioactive materials.



"Hence there is a chance a new wave of contamination will begin in two or three years, with a new inflow of cesium from the mountains and the ammonia accelerating its uptake into plants," the Nagoya-based molecular biologist said.

Despite all this, the biggest challenge for Fukushima rice farmers might lie elsewhere, as distrust of produce from the whole northeastern Tohoku region is widespread among consumers.

Certainly Tetsuya Ebisudani, who oversees radiation matters at the Tokyo-based Daichi-o-Mamoru-Kai organic food distributor, and who has consistently supported J-Rap's efforts, admits that orders for Fukushima produce remain far below the pre-March 2011 levels. Moreover, he discloses that they are even lower than last year despite separate sampling tests by the government, the producers and the distributors all pointing to lower contamination levels this year.

Ebisudani speculates that this further fall is because last year, although many consumers stopped buying anything from Fukushima, many others chose to support the area's farmers by eating their produce. "People don't have that sense of urgency anymore," he said. "It will take a long time before consumers come back."

To make matters even worse, Ebisudani says the government has made a series of missteps that have fueled consumers' fears and distrust. He argues, for example, that the government should have set a much lower safety limit immediately after the disaster. Instead, its failure to do so gave people the impression that all foodstuffs on the market when the limit was 500 becquerels per kilogram were likely contaminated to just below that level.

Another great blunder appears to have been made a year ago by Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato, who hastily announced that all his prefecture's rice was safe — only for it to be revealed soon after that some bags of rice from the city of Fukushima, as well as from Date and Nihonmatsu, registered in excess of 500 becquerels per kilogram.

This year, the prefectural government is testing all 30-kg bags of Fukushima rice using conveyer-belt-style radiation detectors that can screen out all bags emitting 100 becquerels per kilogram of radiation or more. So far, the tests have detected no rice — out of some 2 million bags checked — that exceeds the limit.

Again, though, this has given a fearful and skeptical public the impression that Fukushima rice may have barely cleared the 100-becquerel hurdle. That despite claims on the prefectural government's website that radiation emissions of 25 to 50 becquerels have been registered from just 1,500 bags out of 2 million — while all the rest have registered from zero to 25.



Trust, once lost, is extremely hard to get back.

Ito, when asked about the lingering psychological barriers toward Fukushima rice among consumers, said he has never begged people to buy his rice, and he never will. "I want people to understand that we have done as much as we can," he said in a tone combining pride, defiance and a tinge of indignation.

"We managed to keep to 3 becquerels per kilogram last year, and the figures will go down further this year. But ultimately, it's the consumers' choice. They can decide to buy from us — or not to."

No problem with power supply this winter

October 14, 2012

Utilities expect 3% or greater surplus in winter

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121013002086.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Electricity supply and demand for 9 utilities

Company	Maximum forecast demand (kilowatts)	Surplus capacity (%)	
		Jan.	Feb.
Hokkaido	5.63 mil.	6.7	5.8
Tohoku	14.08 mil.	6.9	6.1
Tokyo	50.5 mil.	7.5	9.4
Chubu	23.67 mil.	4.8	6.6
Kansai	25.37 mil.	5.2	4.1
Hokuriku	5.19 mil.	7.3	8.3
Chugoku	10.96 mil.	6.3	7.7
Shikoku	5.10 mil.	9.0	9.1
Kyushu	15.37 mil.	3.4	3.1
Total	155.87 mil.		

All electric power companies in the nation, with the exception of Okinawa Electric Power Co., which has no nuclear reactors, are expected to secure at least 3 percent surplus power this winter, according to reports.

The government announced on Friday the results of the reports from the nine utilities, which indicated they expect to secure more than the minimum necessary surplus power during the peak-demand months of January and February.

However, the government may still ask Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to set a power-saving target of up to about 10 percent as the supply-demand situation in its service area is expected to be tight this winter.

That day, the government also held a meeting of its committee tasked with examining power supply and demand situations this winter.

Based on documents submitted by the power companies, the committee chaired by Shinkun Haku, senior vice minister of the Cabinet Office, aims to compile related measures, including requests for utilities to save power, by the end of this month.

The power situation in Hokkaido is significantly different in winter, when heating is typically on all day, than in summer, when power use peaks in the afternoon.

Although the Tomari nuclear power plant was operating last winter, the plant has been idled since it was shut down for regular inspections in May.

With a restart of the plant's nuclear reactors not expected anytime soon, Hokkaido's total output capacity of about 6 million kilowatts comes from the Tomato Atsuma thermal power plant and other large thermal plants.

However, the trouble with such plants is they can grind to a halt due to mechanical problems such as pipes freezing.

As other power utilities in Honshu can supply up to only 600,000 kilowatts, Hokkaido could face a severe power shortage if one or more of its power plants is halted.

Though the power surplus rates of Kyushu Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co. are lower than Hokkaido Electric's, they are able to receive supplies from Chubu Electric Power Co. and utilities in western Japan if needed.

No power shortages expected this winter

Reserves likely to be sufficient at peak demand

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121014a7.html>

Japan will probably avoid electricity shortages this winter, barring unexpected shutdowns of thermal power plants, based on the projections of regional utilities.

At a government panel meeting on electricity supply and demand Friday, the nine power companies that serve regions other than Okinawa all reported that their reserve capacity in January to February, when demand traditionally peaks, is expected to top the minimum level of 3 percent necessary to maintain a stable energy supply.

In Hokkaido, where supply and demand could be especially tight if the winter is as severe as that in fiscal 2010, maximum electricity demand is estimated to reach 5.63 million kw in February, against total supply capacity of 5.96 million kw.

That would still leave Hokkaido Electric Power Co. with a spare capacity of 5.8 percent. But supply shortfalls could still occur if the utility's major thermal power plants run into any trouble, especially the 700,000-kw No. 4 unit at the Tomatoatsuma thermal power station, since it accounts for more than 10 percent of the utility's total supply capacity.

In such an event, power companies based in Honshu would be able to supply Hokkaido Electric with an additional 600,000 kw at most. The government may consider whether it needs to set a power-saving target of 5 to 10 percent for the prefecture.

In western Japan, a 3.1 percent reserve capacity is forecast by Kyushu Electric Power Co., 4.1 percent by Kansai Electric Power Co. and 4.8 percent by Chubu Electric power Co., providing temperatures this winter remain at the same level as in fiscal 2011.

The overall reserve capacity of power companies in western Japan, including Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co., is expected to come to between 5 and 6 percent. So even if some areas experience shortfalls, they would be covered by extra power from other utilities.

In addition to Chugoku Electric and Shikoku Electric, reserve capacity at Tokyo Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Hokuriku Electric Power Co. is also expected to remain well above 5 percent.

Nothing has changed in Odaka

October 16, 2012

Fukushima district a wasteland despite preparations to lift evacuation order



A section of the Odaka district in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, hit by the March 2011 tsunami remains covered in wreckage a half-year after the area was designated a zone preparing for the lifting of the evacuation order. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121016p2a00m0na007000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- It has been six months since the Odaka district of this city was designated a zone preparing for the lifting of the evacuation order, but the tsunami-battered coast remains a wasteland of destroyed belongings, empty homes and wrecked cars.

The Odaka district went from being part of the Fukushima nuclear disaster exclusion zone to a zone preparing for the lifting of the evacuation order on June 16 this year, meaning people can now enter the area during the day but still cannot stay overnight. Only a handful of businesses have started back up, and the streets remain mostly devoid of life. When the Mainichi talked to one of the few people out and about, they said that "though it's been half a year, nothing has changed."

"There are a lot of young people from here who simply don't want to come back," said 66-year-old Takao Motonomi, who owns a construction business in Odaka but now lives in refugee housing in Minamisoma's Kashima district. "People say that we'll be able to move back in two or three years, but no one really knows, and that's the most nerve-wracking thing of all."

Conservation efforts continue

October 16, 2012

Electricity sales dip amid conservation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20121016a3.html>

Kyodo

April-September electricity sales for the 10 main providers edged 0.2 percent lower from a year earlier to 455.34 billion kwh in the second straight year-on-year drop for the first half of the fiscal year as corporations and homes continued conservation efforts, an industry body said Monday.

Sales from nuclear power tumbled 92.9 percent to 5.27 billion kwh as all of the nation's nuclear energy plants were idled in the face of the Fukushima crisis, while those of thermal power jumped 21.1 percent to 323.88 billion kwh to make up for the loss of nuclear power, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan said in its preliminary report.

The capacity utilization rate of nuclear plants averaged 2.6 percent, the lowest for a six-month period since fiscal 1988, when officials began compiling comparable data.

The amount of liquefied natural gas used in thermal power generation reached an all-time high for the April-September period.

In September alone, power sales dropped 0.4 percent from a year earlier to 76.53 billion kwh, the first fall in two months.

A joke in very bad taste

October 16, 2012

French TV's Fukushima satire riles Japan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121016_15.html

A French TV host has riled Japan by showing a satirical picture of a Japanese goalkeeper with 4 arms and calling his good performance in a recent soccer friendly the "Fukushima effect."

Japan beat France 1-0 in the match on Friday. Goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima contributed to Japan's first-ever victory over France by repeatedly blocking scoring drives.

In a variety show aired Saturday night on national TV channel France 2, the host said Japanese keeper Kawashima was wonderful.

A composite photo of Kawashima with 4 arms then appeared on screen.

The host said he believes it was the "Fukushima effect," apparently referring to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in March last year.

The Japanese Embassy in Paris sent a letter of protest to France 2 on Monday.

Some European media reacted critically to the remarks. A newspaper in Belgium where Kawashima currently plays said the remarks went too far.

See also in the Japan Times <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121016x2.html>

Fukushima joke lends French TV host in hot water

"Only for truly necessary projects"

October 16, 2012

Noda instructs ministers to scrutinize use of reconstruction budget

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121016p2g00m0dm067000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda instructed his Cabinet members Tuesday to scrutinize the use of the disaster reconstruction budget, emphasizing that it should be "used only for truly necessary projects," Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said.

Noda said during a meeting on reconstruction work attended by all Cabinet members that the money should, in principle, be used only for projects targeting areas devastated by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami from the next fiscal year starting April, said Fujimura, the government's top spokesman.

The premier's comments came amid growing criticism that the budget is being used for other purposes, such as a project to counter the obstructive activities of antiwhaling group Sea Shepherd Conservation Society against Japanese whaling ships and the promotion of youth exchanges with Asian countries and the United States.

Such uses have been condemned by business circles, as well as by Shinzo Abe, leader of the main opposition Liberal Democratic Party, who has described the expenditures as "irresponsible."

During the meeting at the prime minister's office, Makoto Iokibe, head of an advisory panel set up under the Reconstruction Agency, said the budget, most of which comes from reconstruction taxes paid by the public, should be used for rebuilding disaster-hit areas.

The government is now planning to allocate expenditures aimed at advancing disaster-prevention measures in areas other than those hit by the quake-tsunami catastrophe only to pressing projects, officials said.

New projects other than those for disaster prevention will be allowed only in the afflicted areas, they said, adding that the government will also study whether ongoing projects outside these areas that are scheduled to last through or beyond fiscal 2013 should continue.

A House of Councillors panel, meanwhile, decided unanimously to hold a meeting Thursday to examine the reconstruction budget. Finance Minister Koriki Jojima, reconstruction minister Tatsuo Hirano and other ministers are slated to participate, lawmakers said.

Last Thursday, a House of Representatives panel was supposed to discuss the matter, but the meeting was called off as not enough members were present due to the absence of lawmakers of Noda's Democratic Party of Japan, triggering a backlash from the opposition camp.

Should they get married?

October 17, 2012

TEPCO terminates damages payments for emotional distress to women that marry

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121017p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has terminated damages payments to multiple women, who got married while taking shelter, for their emotional distress caused by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, arguing that their livelihoods were restored through marriage, it has been learned.

There are no such provisions in the interim guidelines that define the scope of compensation for nuclear crisis-linked damage set by the screening committee of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which oversees the status of compensation payments, also said, "Payments should not be terminated for reasons of marriage or job transfer." The two government agencies have started to try to figure out exactly what has been taking place.

According to a woman in her 30s and her family who evacuated to temporary housing in the central part of Fukushima Prefecture from their home in a planned evacuation zone in Futaba County near the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station, the woman got married to a man in Sukagawa in the same prefecture in October 2011 and moved to her husband's home.

When she requested the compensation payments for her mental distress for the 2011 September-November period in February this year, a TEPCO official in charge noticed the change of her family name and implied that the utility would terminate damages payments for her. TEPCO headquarters called her later to inform her that it had discontinued damages payments for November 2011 and thereafter, explaining that her livelihood was restored through marriage.

The interim guidelines set forth in August 2011 by the science ministry's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation stipulate that monthly payments of 100,000 yen should be made in principle to each of those who were forced to move from evacuation zones and take shelter for long periods. Under the guidelines, the utility should pay compensation "until they can return home," but because it is not clear when the troubled nuclear power plant will be brought under control, it is difficult to say specifically when the utility will be able to terminate damages payments. Hence, the guidelines have no reference to marriages.

The woman consulted with the Dispute Reconciliation Center for Nuclear Damage Compensation, saying, "My mental distress will not simply disappear through marriage." TEPCO replied in late September that it would pay a total of 600,000 yen covering six months from December 2011 to May this year. However, the utility has not sent her the necessary documents to request damages payments after that period.

The woman's mother said irately, "Does that mean if women want to receive compensation, they should not get married?" Speaking to the Mainichi Shimbun, an official of the utility's public relations department admitted that the company had discontinued damages payments to multiple women because they got married, saying, "We cannot answer questions about individual cases. We apply judgment on a case-by-case basis."

TEPCO has come under fire from government officials for its handling of damages payments. A science ministry official said, "The mental distress brought on by prolonged life as evacuees does not disappear through marriage." An official of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy said, "It is wrong to terminate compensation payments for reasons of marriage."

French TV sorry

October 17, 2012

French TV apologizes for Fukushima joke

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121017_12.html

French national broadcaster France 2 has apologized to Japan for joking that a Japanese soccer player had performed well thanks to radiation from the nuclear accident in Fukushima.

A France 2 presenter praised Japanese goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima on a variety show on Saturday for his performance in a friendly match in which Japan beat France 1-0.

He said Kawashima's strong blocks against France were apparently due to the "Fukushima effect." The program showed a mock-up of Kawashima with 4 arms.

France 2 released a statement on Tuesday offering a deep apology for hurting Japanese people's feelings.

The station said the presenter was only trying to mock the French soccer team and had no intention of upsetting the nuclear disaster victims and the Japanese public.

The Japanese embassy in Paris had lodged a protest against the station, saying it had hurt the feelings of the disaster survivors and hampered efforts toward reconstruction.

Tourism losses included in TEPCO's compensation

October 19, 2012

Tepco to expand compensation for tourism industry losses

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121019a4.html>

Jiji

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Thursday it will include companies in the tourism industry in the Tohoku region prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Akita and Yamagata in its list for compensation, besides Fukushima, home to its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Tepco plans to pay 50 percent of the profits that are considered to have been lost due to the plunge in customers between March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, and Feb. 29 this year.

The 3/11 temblor and tsunami resulted in three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, and widespread radioactive fallout that caused mass evacuations and a steep overall business dive.

Up to now, Tepco has only compensated companies in the tourism industry in Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma prefectures, as well as in 27 municipalities in Chiba Prefecture, the city of Yonezawa in Yamagata and the town of Marumori in Miyagi.

Such compensation totaled ¥93.7 billion as of Wednesday.

In the **five newly included prefectures**, compensation will be paid to **inns, restaurants, souvenir shops and taxi operators** to cover lost profits.

Tepco will begin sending out applications Tuesday. Payments will be made about a month after applications are received.

Hokkaido Electric worries about winter

October 20,2012

Hokkaido Electric fears up to 10% power shortfall in winter

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121020p2g00m0dm002000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Hokkaido Electric Power Co. said Friday that demand for electricity may exceed supply by up to 10.4 percent in winter if unexpected problems occur at its major non-nuclear thermal power plant or other power generation facilities.

As the power transmission line connecting Honshu and Hokkaido has a limited capacity, the government will consider setting a goal asking people and companies in Hokkaido to cut power usage by around 5 to 10 percent compared with maximum demand in fiscal 2010, according to sources familiar with the matter.

Hokkaido Electric presented the power shortfall estimate during a government panel meeting looking into power supply and demand in winter, with most of Japan's nuclear reactors expected to remain offline amid strong public concern over their safety in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster last year.

The utility lost 960,000 kilowatts of power supply capacity in the previous fiscal year because of simultaneous problems in power generation equipment.

If such an incident recurs, the utility could face a maximum power shortfall of 10.4 percent this winter, and even if it receives power from Honshu, demand could still exceed supply by 0.4 percent.

Without supply problems, the utility estimates its supply capacity will exceed demand by 6.7 percent in January and 5.8 percent in February -- both above what is seen as the minimum required level of 3 percent.

As for the service areas of eight other Japanese utilities, the government may not have to set numerical power-saving goals. Okinawa Electric Power Co. is not subject to such power-saving efforts because it does not rely on nuclear power.

See also **Hokaido Electric warns of shortages**

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121021b3.html>

NRA's disaster countermeasures - An awful lot of challenges

October 22, 2012

Editorial: Resident-oriented countermeasures against nuclear disasters needed

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20121022p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The government's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) is drawing up new guidelines for countermeasures against nuclear disasters, which will detail measures to evacuate residents near nuclear plants in case of an accident.

The pillar of the new guidelines is the expansion of the disaster countermeasures priority zone -- from the current 8-10 kilometers from a nuclear power station to 30 kilometers. The NRA will complete the guidelines by the end of this month after consulting with local governments hosting such power stations. The authority is urged to work out measures oriented toward local residents that respond to the real situation of each region.

The new guidelines are based on safety standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). If there is a fear of a serious accident at a nuclear plant, the authorities are required to instruct residents within five kilometers from the power station to flee and those within 30 kilometers from the plant to stay indoors and prepare for evacuation.

It is only natural that the NRA has worked out such strict measures considering that residents in extensive areas more than 10 kilometers from the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant were forced to evacuate following the March 2011 accident. However, there are numerous challenges to implementing specific countermeasures.

As a result of the expansion of the priority zone, the number of local bodies that fall under the zone will increase from 45 municipalities in 15 prefectures to 135 municipalities in 21 prefectures. The population of the entire priority zone will also increase about seven-fold to reach approximately 4.8 million.

The municipalities concerned will be required to work out their respective regional disaster-prevention plans based on the new guidelines by the end of this fiscal year. However, some local governments that will be newly covered by the priority zone have no expertise and appear to be at a loss as to how to work out such plans. The NRA, which will shortly release a manual on how to work out regional disaster-prevention plans and the results of its simulation of an accident at each of Japan's nuclear plants, should proactively help local bodies make such plans.

In case of a nuclear plant accident, local residents may be forced to evacuate across prefectural borders. The central government must coordinate cooperation between affected local bodies in guiding residents to evacuate in case of such an accident. At the first nuclear disaster prevention conference on Oct. 19, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda instructed Cabinet ministers concerned to take all possible measures to eliminate the anxieties of residents in areas hosting nuclear plants about accidents. The national government also needs to extend financial assistance to local governments and help them secure the necessary human resources for nuclear disaster prevention measures.

The national and local governments should repeatedly conduct disaster nuclear drills covering extensive areas in order to make sure their disaster prevention plans are effective. Such efforts will certainly heighten residents' awareness of the need to prepare for nuclear accidents.

The situation with Fukushima Prefecture, which hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, is different from those of other local bodies that host nuclear plants. The national government has declared that the Fukushima plant has been brought to a "cold shutdown," meaning that the plant is now under control. **But the plant is still in an unstable condition.** In an NRA hearing, the prefectural government said that if another accident occurs at the plant, it could have a far more serious impact on the local community.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said concrete measures to prevent another accident at the crippled reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant will be included in the new guidelines. The authority is urged to compile guidelines to reflect the actual situation of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The judgment of whether idled nuclear reactors are safe enough to be reactivated is not legally related to the compilation of regional disaster prevention plans. Still, Tanaka acknowledges that from the standpoint of local residents, the government cannot give the green light to the resumption of operations at idled reactors unless decent regional disaster prevention plans have been worked out.

The consent of municipalities hosting nuclear power stations is indispensable for the reactivation of idled nuclear reactors. If the central government and electric power companies want to try to resume operations at nuclear reactors stopped for regular inspections or other reasons, they should win consent from local bodies that fall under disaster countermeasures priority zones and also compile regional disaster prevention plans.

Seven out of 21 so far

October 25, 2012

7 prefectures secure shelters for residents living in nuclear power plant zones

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121025p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Seven of 21 prefectures in Japan with urgent protective action planning zones (UPZ) within 30 kilometers of the nation's nuclear power plants have already secured places for residents to evacuate in the event of a nuclear disaster, a Mainichi survey has found.

Another six prefectures have partially secured shelters for residents. However just two prefectures -- Yamaguchi and Fukuoka -- have settled on methods of evacuation, the survey found.

Sixteen of the prefectures have still not decided on a course of action in the distribution of iodine preparations, which are designed to protect people's thyroid glands from radioactive iodine, as officials wait for the government to reach a conclusion on the issue. As local bodies are now formulating regional disaster prevention plans, the government is likely to come under pressure to respond.

In its survey, the Mainichi Shimbun asked prefectural government departments in charge of nuclear plants whether shelters had been secured for UPZ residents, whether methods of evacuation had been secured, and whether residents would be permitted to evacuate by car, among other questions.

The prefectures of Hokkaido, Ishikawa, Tottori, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, Saga and Nagasaki said they had secured places for residents to evacuate. Hokkaido, which hosts Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s Tomari Nuclear Power Plant, has secured accommodation for residents in hotels, inns and other locations outside its UPZ. Ishikawa Prefecture, the home of Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika Nuclear Power Plant, had six cities and towns outside the UPZ agree to take in evacuees, and the prefecture is now in the process of deciding how to divide up shelters among the 150,000 residents who would be affected. Other prefectures have decided to have public facilities outside the zones accept evacuees.

The six prefectures of Aomori, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Fukui, Shiga and Kagoshima have partially secured destinations to which their UPZ residents can evacuate. Ibaraki Prefecture is mulling using the Tsukuba International Congress Center and other locations as shelters, wary of the fact that a nuclear disaster coupled with an earthquake or tsunami could limit the places to which residents could evacuate.

Ibaraki Prefecture has the largest number of people in a single UPZ, with some 930,000 residents living in the UPZ around Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tokai No. 2 Nuclear Power Plant.

"We can't think of methods of evacuation until we have decided on the scope of evacuations and the stage at which people should evacuate," a prefectural representative said.

Shizuoka Prefecture has about 740,000 people in the UPZ around Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant. The prefectural government says evacuations would be a subject of future investigation, as they would need to be implemented over a wide area -- something the prefecture has never done before.

A total of 12 prefectures said they would suggest that residents evacuate by car or allow them to do so -- possibly conflicting with the central government's basic disaster plan which states that in the event of a multiple disaster, residents fleeing from a tsunami should evacuate on foot. The Fukushima Prefectural Government says it will allow people in sparsely populated areas to evacuate by car, but will call for people in cities to be prudent.

The Toyama Prefectural Government told the Mainichi that it has finished stockpiling iodine preparations for six cities in an applicable zone within a radius of 50 kilometers. This includes one dose for every person under the age of 40. Ibaraki Prefecture, which would need to stockpile preparations for about 550,000 people, says it will seek the opinion of experts after the government produces a concrete plan -- waiting for the Nuclear Regulation Authority to first make a move.

Official visits to Fukushima Daiichi

October 25, 2012

Three governors visit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121025p2g00m0dm022000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The governors of Tokyo, Ibaraki and Gunma prefectures visited the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on Wednesday, **the first prefectural heads apart from the Fukushima governor to do so since last year's nuclear disaster**, according to the complex's operator Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara, Ibaraki Gov. Masaru Hashimoto and Gunma Gov. Masaaki Osawa, who were in Fukushima Prefecture to attend a meeting of governors from the Kanto region in eastern Japan from Tuesday, suddenly changed their schedules to visit the plant.

During their two-hour visit, the three governors **observed the six-reactor complex from a bus** and met with workers dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster in an earthquake-proof building at the plant.

After their visit, Ishihara reiterated his opposition to the elimination of nuclear power, saying, "I really think it is foolish to abandon a modern and new technological system because of the accident."

Meanwhile, Hashimoto, the governor of Ibaraki Prefecture which neighbors Fukushima, said, "In the quiet solitude of the town, I would say that we should not allow nuclear power plants to operate unless it is assured that they will never cause an accident." Hashimoto was referring to the empty town near the plant evacuated by residents after the nuclear disaster triggered by the March 2011 massive earthquake and tsunami.

Kibo no Kuni - The Land of Hope

October 26, 2012

'Kibo no Kuni (The Land of Hope)'

Digging for hope among nuclear debris

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ff20121026a1.html>

By MARK SCHILLING

Not long ago Sion Sono was known abroad mainly as a maker of cult shockers, starting with his 2001 international hit "Jisatsu Sakuru (Suicide Club)."

Kibo no Kuni (The Land of Hope)

Rating: (4 out of 5)



Human meltdown: Cattle raiser Yasuhiko Ono (Isao Natsuyagi) faces a difficult future in "Kibo no Kuni (The Land of Hope)," after another nuclear disaster rocks a Japan that has learned little. Director Sion Sono spent time with evacuees of Fukushima's no-go zone to portray the wider spectrum of emotions that much of the media left out. © 2012 The Land of Hope Film Partners

Director: Sion Sono

Running time: 133 minutes

Language: Japanese

Now Showing

[See Japan Times movie listing]

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Kibo no Kuni (The Land of Hope)

Human meltdown: Cattle raiser Yasuhiko Ono (Isao Natsuyagi) faces a difficult future in "Kibo no Kuni (The Land of Hope)," after another nuclear disaster rocks a Japan that has learned little. Director Sion Sono spent time with evacuees of Fukushima's no-go zone to portray the wider spectrum of emotions that much of the media left out. © 2012 The Land of Hope Film Partners

Director: Sion Sono

Running time: 133 minutes

Language: Japanese

Now Showing



[See Japan Times movie listing]

His films still supply rude jolts to the system, though in his latest work he has also shown a more serious side. "Himizu," originally intended as another in a long line of local films about disaffected youth, was reworked by Sono in 2011 in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake into a drama about the impact of the triple disaster on the disturbed teenage hero and those around him. Though its extreme violence was familiar, "Himizu" delivered a surprisingly cathartic charge.

Sono is not yet finished with the subject, however. His newest film, "Kibo no Kuni (The Land of Hope)," focuses on the victims of a future Fukushima-like reactor meltdown caused by a massive earthquake in rural Japan.

Scripted by Sono from his own story, "The Land of Hope" can be read as an ironic indictment of an industry and a people that apparently learned nothing following the worst nuclear calamity since Chernobyl. Coming so soon after the disaster-related deaths of nearly 19,000 people, it might, in the hands of another filmmaker, seem insensitive, even cynical.

Sono's allegorical approach, though, is not only congenial to him as a filmmaker (his best films to date, 2008's "Ai no Mukidashi [Love Exposure]" and 2010's "Tsumetai Nettaigyo [Cold Fish]," are similarly fabulistic in tone), but right for his subject matter. A naturalistic "problem" film, based on survivor accounts, would be competing against the many Fukushima-themed documentaries, probably to its disadvantage. Also, Sono's "what if?" scenario allows him to go beyond conventional realism to incisively satirize a bureaucratic bloody-mindedness that has so often had negative consequences.

Finally, it gives "The Land of Hope" a universality it might have not otherwise had. In an age rife with disaster, natural, man-made or a combination of the two, his central family's stark dilemma could be anyone's.

Yasuhiko Ono (Isao Natsuyagi), an elderly cattle raiser, and his dementia-afflicted wife Chieko (Naoko Otani), live together in a rural village with their feckless only son, Yoichi (Jun Murakami), and his newly pregnant wife Izumi (Megumi Kagurazaka). Their neighbors across the street, the Suzukis, have a similar family structure, though the husband and wife (Denden and Mariko Tsutsui) are both healthy, while their eldest son, Mitsuru (Yutaka Shimizu), who zips around town on his motorbike with his hot young girlfriend (Hikari Kajiwarra), is still in the rebellious stage.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zkxFrqK-ujg

Then the quake strikes and the nearby nuclear plant begins spewing dangerous radiation that Yasuhiko picks up on his Geiger counter (but which the radio news broadcasts neglect to mention). Soon, workers in creepy white protective suits are marking off the limits of a 20-km evacuation zone right down their street, with the Onos allowed to stay and the Suzukis made to go. But Yasuhiko, distrusting official assurances, urges Yoichi and Izumi to escape while they still can. Worried about her unborn child, Izumi needs little persuading.

The ensuing drama reflects some of the more shocking and disturbing 3/11 headlines, though Sono's treatment is anything but sensationalistic. Instead he cuts through the fog of the media's disaster coverage, with its stereotyping of the victims as "stoic" and "heroic," to the not-so-noble emotions many were actually feeling — from Mitsuru's rage at his family's forced exile to Izumi's obsessive fear of an invisible enemy. He also makes us understand Yasuhiko's stubborn determination to remain on his land, though the character knows better than anyone the risks he is running.

The action is largely confined to Yasuhiko's farm and its environs, while budgetary limitations mean no exploding reactors, panicking crowds or other showy effects. This, as well as Sono's preference for stylization over naturalism, gives the film a rather stagy feel.

At the same time, he produces some striking imagery, such as an overhead view of the "no-go zone" fence slicing like a razor across the countryside, while the performances of his cast, particularly veteran Natsuyagi as the unbending Yasuhiko, vividly (if theatrically) express the truth behind the victims' public face of silent endurance.

The film long refuses to clarify what, if anything, the characters have to look forward to. But the hope promised in the title, when it arrives, is not a last-minute sop to audience sentiment. Instead it flows from a human instinct that even melting reactors can never kill, unless they kill us first.

Lack of manpower makes reconstruction lag

October 27, 2012

Disaster-zone project spending up but workers elude

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121027a8.html>

Public works spending in 58 disaster-hit municipalities in the northeast surged 2.6-fold in fiscal 2011 compared with average levels thanks to reconstruction funding, but many projects lag because of a lack of manpower, according to the Board of Audit.

In a report submitted Thursday to the Diet, the board called for these local governments to be offered further assistance because the spike in recovery-related government funds has created severe employee shortfalls, resulting in a decline in the execution rate of projects.

The government allocated some ¥14.92 trillion for restoration work in the last fiscal year, and public works projects funded with reconstruction money in these municipalities totaled ¥592.6 billion in fiscal 2011, a huge increase from the average of ¥223.1 billion seen in the preceding five years. The figure was 10 times higher in 10 municipalities in the worst-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

But data compiled by the board also showed the average execution rate for public works came to just 48.8 percent in the 58 municipalities, and that this figure dropped to less than 20 percent in six of them. On a general account basis, the equivalent rate at 16 central government agencies stood at 60.6 percent in the reporting year.

In addition to Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, the board audited municipalities in Aomori, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Chiba prefectures to examine state subsidies and grants allocated for reconstruction work following the March 2011 quake and tsunami.

In terms of public works expenditure per employee, the civil engineering division of Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture saw spending jump nearly 20 times compared with predisaster levels, while five other municipalities posted increases 10 times more than in an average year.

"Abnormally high public works budgets due to reconstruction-related funding has placed a huge strain on employees," the board noted.

Of the 58 municipalities, 40 have accepted a total of 800 employees dispatched from central government entities, other prefectures and municipalities, while 42 have hired a combined 2,088 workers on a temporary basis.

October 26, 2012

Half of disaster reconstruction outlays remain unused

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121026p2a00m0na009000c.html>

An average of just 48 percent of national funds doled out last fiscal year to 58 municipalities in seven prefectures hit hard by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster has been spent, a probe by the Board of Audit of Japan has found.

The board's examination shows that the ratio of budget spending has been particularly low in local governments along the Pacific coastal region devastated by the killer tsunami.

Although the number of jobs to restore and rebuild roads, and other engineering work has increased, there has been a shortage of staff to do those jobs, preventing municipalities concerned from using up national outlays in the form of state subsidies and reconstruction grants.

The board urged the central government on Oct. 25 to obtain an overview of affected local governments' staffing levels and extend support to those in need, accordingly.

The board checked 58 cities, towns and villages in Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima and four other prefectures that received reconstruction grant notification in March this year. One city received such notification but did not receive any grants. The board sent out questionnaires to those local governments about subsidies and reconstruction grants supplied under the first through third supplementary budgets during fiscal 2011, asking them how much of the funds had been spent by March this year.

Of about 592.6 billion yen in total, the municipalities had utilized about 289.5 billion yen. Many coastal municipalities made use of only 30 to 40 percent of the assistance allotted. The town of Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture and the town of Hirono in Iwate Prefecture used only 6 percent and 11 percent of subsidies and reconstruction grants, respectively. On the other hand, the city of Higashimatsushima in Miyagi Prefecture spent 94 percent of aid it received from the central government.

Progress in restoring and rebuilding roads and other public facilities, as well as the disposal of debris, has been very slow. Although the number of employees and staff in charge of engineering jobs in the 58 municipalities increased by 208 from 2,968 before the disasters, public works costs among 10 local governments alone jumped tenfold.

Public works spending per employee in engineering work increased by 19 times from pre-disaster levels in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, and 15 times in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, while the ratios of budget execution stood at 34 percent and 46 percent, respectively. Many local governments with increasing numbers of public works had low ratios of budget execution.

An engineering works official at the Kamaishi Municipal Government says there is a shortage of engineering works employees to help upgrade infrastructure and negotiate land deals for mass relocations of residents to safe ground. A Board of Audit official says personnel assistance is important in ensuring a smooth reconstruction process.

Preparedness in the 30km-zone

October 25, 2012

7 prefectures secure shelters for residents living in nuclear power plant zones

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121025p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Seven of 21 prefectures in Japan with urgent protective action planning zones (UPZ) within 30 kilometers of the nation's nuclear power plants have already secured places for residents to evacuate in the event of a nuclear disaster, a Mainichi survey has found.

Another six prefectures have partially secured shelters for residents. However just two prefectures -- Yamaguchi and Fukuoka -- have settled on methods of evacuation, the survey found.

Sixteen of the prefectures have still not decided on a course of action in the distribution of iodine preparations, which are designed to protect people's thyroid glands from radioactive iodine, as officials wait for the government to reach a conclusion on the issue. As local bodies are now formulating regional disaster prevention plans, the government is likely to come under pressure to respond.

In its survey, the Mainichi Shimbun asked prefectural government departments in charge of nuclear plants whether shelters had been secured for UPZ residents, whether methods of evacuation had been secured, and whether residents would be permitted to evacuate by car, among other questions.

The prefectures of Hokkaido, Ishikawa, Tottori, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, Saga and Nagasaki said they had secured places for residents to evacuate. Hokkaido, which hosts Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s Tomari Nuclear Power Plant, has secured accommodation for residents in hotels, inns and other locations outside its UPZ. Ishikawa Prefecture, the home of Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika Nuclear Power Plant, had six cities and towns outside the UPZ agree to take in evacuees, and the prefecture is now in the process of deciding how to divide up shelters among the 150,000 residents who would be affected. Other prefectures have decided to have public facilities outside the zones accept evacuees.

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Ibaraki Prefecture has the largest number of people in a single UPZ, with some 930,000 residents living in the UPZ around Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tokai No. 2 Nuclear Power Plant.

"We can't think of methods of evacuation until we have decided on the scope of evacuations and the stage at which people should evacuate," a prefectural representative said.

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Shortage of labour and materials

October 29, 2012

25 percent of public works projects in disaster-struck areas fail to get bidders

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121029p2a00m0na009000c.html>

About 25 percent of public works projects placed by Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures and the city of Sendai between April and August this year were not concluded because bids on the projects did not materialize, a survey by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) shows.

The MLIT probe found that **many firms have decided not to tender bids for public works projects under the central government's reconstruction budget because they cannot make a profit due to rising material and labor costs even if they win the bid.**

The finding comes in the wake of the revelation that certain amounts of budgets for reconstruction of disaster-hit areas are being spent on non-disaster regions. The three prefectures, Sendai and other regions hard hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis, are concerned that the reconstruction budget may not be utilized in time.

The government has decided to spend about 23 trillion yen over a 10-year period from fiscal 2011 to 2020 under the reconstruction budget, including 19 trillion yen in the first five fiscal years through fiscal 2015.

According to the MLIT, **the ratio of unsuccessful bids came to 47 percent, or 96 cases, in Sendai, followed by 34 percent, or 87 cases, in Miyagi, 20 percent, or 99 cases, in Fukushima and 7 percent, or 19 cases, in Iwate.** There were similar trends in September, ministry officials say.

Many construction companies avoided small public works projects in fiscal 2011 and are even shying away from construction projects in the hundreds of millions of yen in the current fiscal year. In Miyagi Prefecture, bidding for 17 construction projects with a price tag of more than 100 million yen, or about 10 percent of the total projects, did not materialize in fiscal 2011. In the current fiscal year, bidding for 38 cases, or 20 percent of the total, did not take place through September.

The Miyagi Prefectural Government checked with 29 local construction companies and 24 of them cited **rising labor and material costs** as the reason for their decisions not to make bids. There is a big gap between the intended price and the realized price, these firms say, adding they cannot tender bids because they cannot make money even if they make a successful bid at the intended price.

Construction materials are expected to stay in short supply. The MLIT and others say supply of ready-mixed concrete in Miyagi's Kesenuma district in fiscal 2014 will total about 30 percent, or 500,000 cubic meters, of its total needs.

Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai is asking the central government to extend the reconstruction budget's implementation period, saying **a shortage of materials and manpower is hampering reconstruction efforts.**

Reclassification in "radiation-tainted" parts of Fukushima

October 30, 2012

Nuke evacuees' homecoming picks up steam

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121030f1.html>

FUKUSHIMA — Steps are gradually being taken to let evacuees return to **radiation-tainted parts of Fukushima Prefecture** six months after reorganization of the hot zones began.

Although it is unclear when people will be allowed to go back to their homes, more than 40 businesses have opened their doors in redesignated areas near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant following attempted decontamination work.

Of the 11 municipalities that fell within the original evacuation zones, including the 20-km exclusion zone around the power plant, five have acquiesced to the central government's decision to regroup areas into three zones based on radiation level.

The reclassification was applied to the cities of Tamura, Kawauchi and Minamisoma in April, the village of Iitate in July and the town of Naraha in August.

Since then, some firms have been allowed to resume business, with about 42 reopening so far, the municipalities said.

In Naraha, six businesses linked to decontamination and reconstruction are up and running and 10 contractors are set to return shortly, according to Kaoru Saito, director general of the town's chamber of commerce and industry.

But since it is unclear when residents will be able to return permanently, "there are no prospects" for restaurants and retailers reopening anytime soon, Saito said.

The threat of rate hikes

October 30, 2012

Kepeco contemplates rate hike after record first-half loss

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20121030a1.html>

Jiji

OSAKA — Kansai Electric Power Co. said Monday that it might hike electricity prices after suffering a record group net loss of ¥116.785 billion in the April-September first half.

The utility, which would be the second to raise electricity prices since the Fukushima disaster, reported a ¥20.492 billion profit the year before.

Kepeco, which serves the Kansai region in western Japan, saw fuel costs at thermal power plants surge in the first half of fiscal 2012 after it was unable to restart nine of its 11 nuclear reactors shut down by the Fukushima crisis.

If the situation continues and electricity rates stay the same, "our company's financial conditions will worsen drastically, possibly affecting our primary mission of safe and stable power supplies," Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi told a press conference here.

The rate hike would affect both corporate and household customers, Yagi said. The timing and size of the hike haven't been decided yet, he said.

Kansai Electric was earlier reported to be mulling a hike of more than 10 percent for households and over 20 percent for businesses starting in April 2013.

"We need to increase operational efficiency to win support for a rate hike from users," Yagi said, indicating a willingness to slash personnel, advertising, research and other costs "with no sanctuary."

It would be Kepeco's first major rate hike since 1980 and also require government approval.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. raised rates by an average 14.9 percent for corporate users in April and by 8.46 percent for households in September to offset massive expenses related to the triple meltdown at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which was crippled by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami last year.

Other utilities are also considering rate hikes to offset fuel costs generated by the sudden reversion to thermal power generation. Only two of the nation's 50 commercial nuclear reactors are running now.

The two units — Nos. 3 and 4 at Kansai Electric's Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture — resumed operation in July and were the first to be brought back online since the Fukushima disaster.

"We hope to keep nuclear plants as an important source of power generation," Yagi said.

For the April-September half, Kansai Electric reported group sales of ¥1.406 trillion, up 0.8 percent from a year earlier.

The company took a pretax loss of ¥171.947 billion, compared with a profit of ¥37.864 billion the previous year, as fuel costs and electricity purchases from other utilities rose by a combined ¥274.3 billion.

Kepeco also skipped interim dividend payments for the first time in 32 years. Its earnings forecasts for the full year and term-end dividend plans were left undecided.

For the first half of fiscal 2011, the firm paid an interim dividend of ¥30 per share.

Power firms plagued by rising costs after nuke crisis set to hike electricity charges

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121030p2a00m0na002000c.html>

OSAKA -- Kansai Electric Power Co. President Makoto Yagi said on Oct. 29 that his company has begun to consider raising electricity charges as part of its efforts to address its tough business conditions in the wake of the outbreak last year of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, setting the stage for other power companies across the country to follow suit.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. is also expected to unveil its plan to consider a rate hike on Oct. 30. Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co. are already considering raising electricity prices, paving the way for almost all power firms in the country to raise electricity charges. Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crisis-hit Fukushima nuclear power station, raised electricity charges in September this year.

Although President Yagi said the timing of the raising of electricity charges was "undecided," his company is considering raising fees for households by an average of about 15 percent and for corporate users by 20 to 30 percent as early as April 2013. Electricity charges for households are regulated by the government.

It is believed to take about four months for the government to examine the company's request for a rate hike. As a result of the screening, the government could demand the company make additional cost cuts, among other steps. It would be Kansai Electric's first fully fledged government-approved rate increase in 33 years since 1980 in the aftermath of the second oil crisis.

Kansai Electric said on Oct. 29 that it logged a group net loss of 116.7 billion yen for the April-September 2012 period, compared with a net profit of 20.4 billion yen registered for the same period a year earlier. That is the biggest group net loss the company has reported for an April-September period since its founding.

Because operations at nine of its nuclear reactors have been offline, with only the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant having been reactivated, the fuel cost to run its thermal power plants rose 180 billion yen in the April-September period from the same time a year earlier. Fuel costs are expected to rise by 700 billion yen in the current full business year from the level registered before the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Kansai Electric relies on nuclear power for about 50 percent of its energy supply -- the highest figure among major electricity companies in the country.

Therefore, the company could not fully address the impact of the rise in fuel costs by implementing cost-cutting measures it had already announced.

Yagi said the company could not foresee its earnings for the current fiscal year through March 2013. But according to estimates made by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE), if all of Kansai Electric's nuclear reactors, except for the two reactors at the Oi plant, were to remain offline, the company's net assets are expected to drop to 574.7 billion yen as of the end of March 2013 -- a drop of 582 billion yen from a year earlier. Thus, it is highly possible that the company's liabilities would exceed its assets within the business year ending March 2014.

Yagi said, "If the situation in which we cannot reactivate the nuclear reactors continues, our financial standing will vastly deteriorate, threatening to hamper our efforts to ensure a stable power supply."

Kyushu Electric also has all of its six nuclear reactors offline. According to ANRE's estimates, the power company is expected to incur additional costs of 470 billion yen in the current business year and its net assets are expected to drop to 308.8 billion yen as of the end of March 2013. Kyushu Electric is poised to formally announce its intention to raise electricity charges when it releases its half-year earnings on Oct. 30. The company will try to raise utility rates around the same time as Kansai Electric.

Hokkaido Electric, Shikoku Electric and Tohoku Electric are also exploring the possibility of raising electricity prices because they have already been hit by deficits due mainly to the suspension of

operations at their nuclear reactors. Chubu Electric, Hokuriku Electric and Chugoku Electric are cautious about rate hikes. But a Chubu Electric official said, "If the nuclear reactors continue to be offline in the future, we will have to look into the possibility of raising prices."

If Tokyo Electric were not able to reactivate the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in April 2013, it would have to take measures including additional rate hikes.

TEPCO to set HQ in Fukushima to help with reconstruction

TEPCO recovery HQ set for Fukushima Pref.

Jiji Press

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121103001957.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to establish its headquarters for nuclear disaster reconstruction in Fukushima Prefecture as early as January next year, it was learned Saturday.

The company will transfer its operations related to decontamination and compensation payments for the nuclear crisis at its stricken Fukushima No. 1 plant to the new reconstruction headquarters from its head office in Tokyo, informed sources said.

The total number of personnel at the Fukushima headquarters is expected to reach about 4,000, or more than 10 percent of TEPCO's total workforce. In addition to about 3,500 employees currently engaging in Fukushima-related work, the company will assign about 500 employees to Fukushima, the sources said.

The plan will be included in the company's new management program to be unveiled next week.

By shifting authority over compensation and decontamination to the Fukushima headquarters, the company hopes to better reflect the opinions of local residents and municipalities in these operations. A vice president-level executive will head the new office, the sources said.

The plan will be finalized after talks with the Fukushima prefectural government.

TEPCO's new management program is expected to include a plan to triple the number of employees tasked with decontamination from the current level of about 100.

The utility also plans to create a system under which a total of 100,000 people will assist in the reconstruction of Fukushima, with all of the company's about 38,000 employees sent in turns to the prefecture.

On top of its current cost reduction plan of 3.36 trillion yen over 10 years, TEPCO will aim for a reduction of more than 100 billion yen per year by reviewing repair expenses, according to the sources. (Nov. 4, 2012)

November 3, 2012

TEPCO to set up headquarters in Fukushima to deal with reconstruction

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121103p2g00m0dm062000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to set up a headquarters in Fukushima Prefecture to deal with reconstruction efforts there including compensation and cleanup and recovery efforts related to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant crippled in the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, sources close to the matter said Saturday.

The utility, known as TEPCO, will include the plan to create a headquarters with a staff exceeding 4,000 in its medium-term management plan to be announced as early as next week, the sources said. Currently, 3,500 employees at the utility are assigned to operations related to Fukushima.

By strengthening the authority of the local headquarters, the utility hopes to demonstrate its commitment to all-out effort to promote reconstruction and compensation, the sources said.

There is mounting discontent among Fukushima municipalities and residents who feel that TEPCO is not reflecting local opinions in its decisions about reconstruction and compensation as they are made at the headquarters in Tokyo.

The head of the Fukushima headquarters will be tapped from within the firm and given the same status as a vice president at the Tokyo headquarters.

Specialists assigned to decontamination efforts will be tripled from the current 100 or so and all of the utility's 38,000 workers will be sent to Fukushima two or three times a year instead of going as volunteers to aid local communities by helping haul furniture and perform other services such as cleaning up houses.

See also in Yomiuri : Tepco eyes Fukushima HQ <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121104a1.html>

More compensation demanded from TEPCO

November 2, 2012

Dialysis patients that evacuated after tsunami demand compensation from TEPCO ***

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121102p2a00m0na012000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- A group of dialysis patients have filed a damage claim with Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, demanding that the utility compensate them for their evacuation outside Fukushima Prefecture to receive treatment after the nuclear disaster.

Representatives from the Fukushima branch of the Japan Association of Kidney Disease Patients (JAKDP) handed a claim to officials at TEPCO's Fukushima community support office on Nov. 1. "TEPCO should pay damage reparations to patients regardless of whether they were in evacuation areas or not," stated the written claim.

In the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, many dialysis patients were forced to evacuate to areas outside Fukushima Prefecture because they were not able to receive artificial dialysis treatment at their hospitals, even though they were living in areas outside nuclear evacuation zones.

Many dialysis patients -- who suffer deteriorated kidney functions -- need to receive artificial dialysis treatment about once every two days, with their life being threatened otherwise.

In Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, hospitals were closed after many nurses evacuated from the city, leaving some 600 dialysis patients unable to continue to receive treatment and forcing them to relocate to Tokyo and other areas en masse.

Because the city of Iwaki was not designated as an evacuation zone, the current reparation scheme defines such patients as "voluntary evacuees," who are eligible for only 80,000 yen each in compensation, according to the government's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation.

"It's not an amount that a patient whose life was put in danger can ever accept," said the chairman of JAKDP's Fukushima branch.

He said dialysis patients who did not evacuate also received reduced treatment.

NRA will help local governments

NRA to draw up model for local govts

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121101003780.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The Nuclear Regulation Authority will create a template for local governments to help them to compile their respective regional nuclear disaster plans, according to its chairman.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said Wednesday the NRA will compile the manual this month based on the NRA's new nuclear disaster guidelines, which were adopted the same day.

The nation's nuclear authority decided to create the template because many local governments are compiling nuclear disaster plans for the first time, or will have to drastically revise the plans they have. Also, areas where key measures will be implemented were largely expanded.

The NRA will help local governments draw up their respective plans through direct contact with them. Many local governments have asked the central government for assistance with compiling the plans.

At a press conference, Tanaka said: "It's important to make the regional disaster-prevention plans feasible. We'll offer assistance to the municipal governments."

In making the template, the NRA will pick some model cases for prefectural and municipal governments. The NRA's secretariat, the Cabinet Office and the Fire and Disaster Management Agency of the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry will work with selected local governments to flesh out details such as actual evacuation methods and temporary evacuation sites.

As a pillar of the new guidelines, zones in which intensive measures would be taken in preparation for a nuclear disaster were expanded to a 30-kilometer radius around nuclear plants.

The new zones cover about 4.8 million people in 135 municipalities near nuclear plants.

A recent simulation of how radioactive substances would spread in the event of a worst-case nuclear disaster showed that some places outside the 30-kilometer zones could be severely polluted.

But the NRA stressed that the results were based on a worst-case scenario. Based on the International Atomic Energy Agency's standards, the NRA decided there was no need to further expand the key areas.

Regarding stable iodine pills for protecting people's thyroid glands from the effects of internal radiation exposure, the NRA this time withdrew its plan, which was included in the draft of the guidelines, to distribute such pills to households within a 50-kilometer-radius area.

The NRA now says it will carefully examine how to distribute iodine pills and in what dosages, after discussing how to prevent improper intake of the pills and measures to deal with side effects.

After the NRA decides what dosages are appropriate it will notify medical personnel in local areas. It also will decide by the end of this year on what radiation levels would require that residents be evacuated, as well as other antidisaster standards.

The local governments will compile their regional disaster management plans by the end of March next year based on the new guidelines and the results of the NRA's simulation of radioactive-substance dispersal.

35% of municipalities not prepared

November 5, 2012

Many municipalities lack disaster evacuation sites

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121105a5.html>

About 35 percent of municipalities that fall inside the government's newly expanded disaster preparation zones around nuclear plants have yet to secure sufficient evacuation sites in the event of a critical accident, a Kyodo News survey showed.

The recent poll found that, excluding Fukushima Prefecture because of last year's nuclear disaster, 29 of 83 municipalities in 20 prefectures that lie within the new disaster zones are not fully prepared to evacuate residents following a severe atomic accident.

The survey also showed that 90 percent of the 83 municipalities have still to decide how to distribute iodine tablets to protect residents' thyroids from radiation exposure, with many citing concerns over possible side effects and difficulties with storage conditions.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, the atomic energy industry's new watchdog, recently expanded the radius for areas required to make special preparations to 30 km from 10 km around atomic energy plants, covering a raft of municipalities that must now draft mitigation plans for the first time.

In the survey, only 12 municipalities said they "have secured" enough evacuation sites, and 29 reported they "do not have any prospect yet" of finding sufficient locations in the near term.

Many local governments replied they do not have any areas to which their residents can flee because their entire municipality, as well as those nearby, fall within disaster preparation zones. For instance, the city of Echizen in Niigata Prefecture pointed out that as virtually all of the areas under its jurisdiction lie within one of the newly designated 30-km zones, all of its residents would have to evacuate the municipality.

The city of Shimada in Shizuoka Prefecture noted that "we will need to work with other municipal authorities to arrange evacuations across prefectural borders" to secure the safe pullout of residents.

Sharing horror stories

November 5, 2012

Fukushima, Nagasaki high-school students share tales of nuclear disaster, bombing

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121105p2a00m0na013000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- High school students here who have been affected by the ongoing nuclear disaster and students at a high school in Nagasaki, where the atomic bomb was dropped 67 years ago, participated in an online conference to exchange views on how to pass down their respective histories.

The event took place as part of the Nagasaki International Peace Film Forum 2012, held by the Nagasaki National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims, and involved students from Fukushima Municipal Haramachi High School in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma, and Kwassui High School in the Nagasaki prefectural capital of Nagasaki.

Haramachi High School students read a poem entitled "Kamikakushi sareta machi" (The town that was spirited away), that was written 18 years ago by local poet Jotaro Wakamatsu about the Chernobyl accident. Natsuko Numano, a third-year student who evacuated from the town of Namie, located 10 kilometers from the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Plant, shared how there were no prospects on how much longer she would remain an evacuee. Another third-year student, Fuyuka Takayama, said, "I wonder how much radiation we've been exposed to. What will happen to our future babies? I'm worried about everything, but there's nothing we can do but move forward."

Kwassui High School students read from "Nijuhibaku: Genshigumo no shita ni seimei o fusete" (Twice Bombed, Twice Survived: My Life under the Atomic Cloud), the memoirs of the late Tsutomu Yamaguchi, who survived both the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They also read the school's peace declaration, and reported on their activities toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.

"Let us work together to pass down what we know to future generations," said second-year Kwassui student Kana Miyamoto, in closing the conference.

Masato Hirose, who survived the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and has been in touch with high school students in Fukushima, said, "I've been participating in activities to prevent further devastation from radiation, but now more people are living in fear of it. And for that, I feel remorseful."

The poet Wakamatsu, who witnessed the event at Haramachi High School, said, "The crisis in Fukushima is ongoing. There is much we can learn from Nagasaki. We need the support of young people."

"We are going backward" - Minamisoma Mayor Sakurai

November 5, 2012

Mayor of disaster-hit Minamisoma urges national gov't to learn from tragedy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121105p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai says Japan is moving in the wrong direction despite last year's twin natural disasters and nuclear crisis which he says provided the country with an excellent opportunity to change itself for the better.

"I seriously question whether politicians on the national level really understand the reality we are facing," he says, adding that the Fukushima tragedy could have been a golden opportunity and a turning point for Japan.

Nearly one year and eight months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant near his city, Sakurai and his staff are still working nonstop.

He paid a visit to Tokyo recently to prod the central government to speed up the radiation decontamination process. But he says his talks with officials of the Reconstruction Agency and the Environment Ministry on Oct. 31 made little headway due to the difficulty in securing temporary storage facilities for contaminated soil before finding long-term storage facilities.

Sakurai is as frustrated with the protracted decontamination work in his city as the way the government, mass media and business leaders are treating the Fukushima nuclear disaster like a thing of the past and are supporting the restart of nuclear reactors.

When Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda signaled his intention in June to go along with the restarts of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant, the mayor was meeting with residents living in temporary housing and evacuation centers. "They asked me, 'Are we completely abandoned?'" he recalled.



Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai meets the media at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo on Nov. 1. (Mainichi)

Sakurai says he was also dismayed by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's remarks on Oct. 9 in favor of reviewing a nuclear zero option policy after he visited Minamisoma as the new president of the main opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and cheered up people in disaster-hit areas on Oct.3.

"We need to change the system that we have here in Japan in which Japanese politicians and Japanese mass media basically work together," the 56-year-old mayor told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ). "But the reality I feel is that we are moving in the completely opposite direction. We are not changing the system for the better. **We are going backward.** We are moving toward the way things were."

Sakurai posted a video critical of the Japanese government's response to the nuclear crisis on YouTube on March 24 last year, drawing attention from around the world. The U.S. weekly magazine Time picked him as one of the world's 100 most influential people in 2011.

Minamisoma's population of 71,000 dropped to less than 10,000 in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear crisis. At present, about 45,500 people live in the city. The city lost 636 residents to the tsunami triggered by the magnitude 9.0 temblor and 350 others lost their lives during forced evacuations and under disaster-related circumstances.

Sakurai says his city wants to focus on a shift to industries to nurture renewable energy sources. Referring to anti-nuclear rallies every Friday near the prime minister's office, he says, "I feel very strongly that politicians must reflect in their policies the feelings of the Japanese people. **The revival of Japan depends on the revival of Fukushima.**"

In the meantime, he says he will continue to jog nearly eight kilometers every morning before work "to maintain a kind of psychological balance." (By Shiro Yoneyama, Staff Writer)

Stop support for evacuees who won't return

November 6, 2012

Fukushima to halt private home support for out-of-prefecture evacuees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121106p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has announced that it will end a housing support system for evacuees from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disasters who are staying in private homes in other prefectures.

Support for people already in the homes will generally continue through March of 2014. **The goal of the stoppage is to encourage evacuees to return to Fukushima Prefecture**, but some, including evacuee support organizations, say the end to the support from after Dec. 28 is too soon.

The program is based on the Disaster Relief Act. Prefectural governments around the country borrow homes within a certain rent range for evacuees from Fukushima and bill the Fukushima Prefecture Government, with the national government covering the cost in the end. Currently, 23 prefectures around the country are accepting applications for the support, but the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare reportedly asked Fukushima Prefecture to stop the program.

Meanwhile, from Nov. 15, Fukushima Prefecture will start such support for evacuee families who return to the prefecture and have children 18 or younger or a pregnant woman in the household.

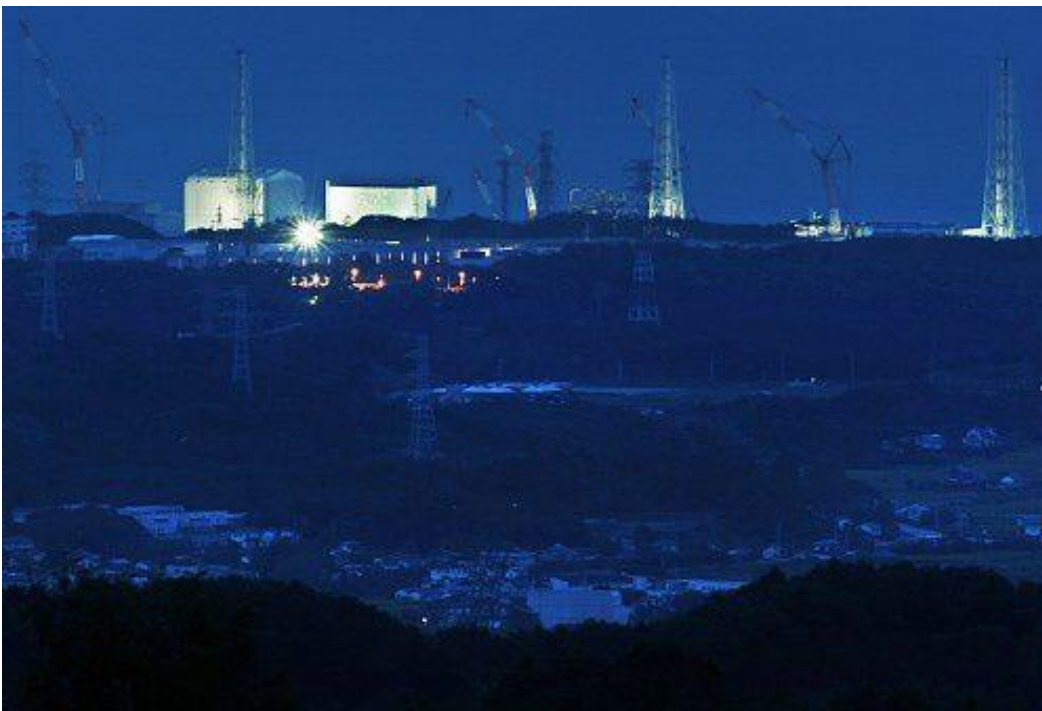
According to the prefecture's evacuee-support department, as of Oct. 4 there were 59,031 out-of-prefecture evacuees in 46 prefectures. From January through June the number was over 62,000, but it has decreased from July. Reasons for the drop are thought to be the rezoning of evacuation areas and the start of decontamination work. Applications for rent support for private out-of-prefecture homes have also decreased, going from around 1,200 people from about 500 households per month from January through April to 328 people from 141 households in June.

Miki Nakamura, 36, representative of an evacuee support group in Yamagata Prefecture, said, "Even now there are inquiries about evacuating to Yamagata Prefecture. **The effects of radiation are continuing, so a policy that allows evacuation at any time is needed.**"

45% of Okuma residents do not want to return

November 7, 2012

45 percent of Fukushima nuke plant host town residents say they won't return: survey



The town of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, and the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are seen on the evening of Oct. 18. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121107p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Nearly half of the residents of evacuated Okuma, the host town of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, said they will not return even if the evacuation order is lifted, according to results of a survey by the Reconstruction Agency released on Nov. 6.

Okuma holds the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and was completely evacuated following the tsunami and the outbreak of the crisis at the nuclear power station. In September, all 5,378 evacuated households were surveyed by mail, with 3,424 households, or 63.7 percent, responding. Those saying they had decided not to return were at 45.6 percent, while those saying they wanted to return were only at 11 percent. Those saying they didn't know yet were at 41.9 percent.

Of people in their teens to 30s, 54.7 percent said they would not return, of people in their 40s to 50s, 48.7 percent said they did not want to live there, and of people 60 and over, 38.9 percent said they didn't want to go back. **Of the reasons for not returning, 80.8 percent of those not wanting to return said they were anxious about radiation, 70.2 percent said they were worried about the nuclear plant's safety, and 67.6 percent said their homes were damaged and not livable anymore.**

Around 95 percent of residents' homes are expected to be in an area designated as unlivable for a long time, with delays in decontamination and worries about repeated problems at the nuclear power plant thought to be behind that designation.

"Considering the lack of good news, I predicted such a result," said Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe about the survey.

Furthermore, only 22.8 percent of respondents said they would live in a temporary community for the town if it was set up, while 24.2 percent said they would not, and 50.8 percent said they did not know.

Foreign funds to help with reconstruction

November 9, 2012

Foreign groups help create fund to reconstruct disaster-hit Minamisoma



Tsuneo Hanzawa, right, president of Abukuma Shinkin Bank in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, and Kazuo Tanaka, executive director of PlaNेट Finance Japan, shake hands after signing an agreement on setting up the Minamisoma Tomodachi Fund for Economic Recovery in Minamisoma on Oct. 29. (Mainichi) <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121109p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Funds from foreign groups are helping firms in Minamisoma promote reconstruction of the city in Fukushima Prefecture following the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster.

Abukuma Shinkin Bank in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, and the nonprofit PlaNet Finance Japan have jointly established a special fund for small and midsized firms to promote reconstruction of the city.

The Minamisoma Tomodachi Fund for Economic Recovery will back up small and midsized enterprises and help rehabilitate the city along the way, says Tsuneo Hanzawa, president of Abukuma Shinkin Bank.

The fund utilizes 200,000 dollars (about 16 million yen) from the nonprofit relief support group Mercy Corps in the U.S. state of Oregon and the Japan-America Society of Oregon to support small and midsized firms with no more than 20 employees.

Specifically, the new fund will provide about three firms with a maximum of 1.5 million yen or about 50 percent of initial costs and provide those companies with around four rehired people 100,000 yen each per month for one year. It will also help selected firms with a total of 5 million yen in interest payments for the first two years of loans of up to 10 million yen.

PlaNet Finance Japan in Tokyo's Minato Ward is the Japanese arm of the Paris-based PlaNet Finance Group which handles financial services for small and midsized enterprises.

PlaNet Finance Japan initiated a 5 million dollar Sanriku tomodachi fund with Shinkin Central Bank and Kesenuma Shinkin for Kesenuma, Minamisanriku in Miyagi Prefecture, and Rikuzentakata and Ofunato in Iwate Prefecture in November last year and provided relief funds in about 200 cases.

Kazuo Tanaka, executive director of PlaNet Finance Japan, says his group wants to back up Minamisoma's efforts to achieve economic recovery and help people back to work.

60-day hike to make a map of disaster area

November 9, 2012

High school students walk coast to draw map showing damage in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121109p2a00m0na018000c.html>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- Local high school students here have walked along the coastline to draw a map showing in detail how areas in this city were damaged by the March 2011 tsunami with the aim of making their hometown disaster-resistant.

About 15 members of Fukushima Prefectural Iwaki High School's astronomy and geosciences club spent 60 days, walking in areas along the 60-kilometer Pacific coastline from the Hisanohama to Nakoso districts of Iwaki to examine traces of tsunami damage and interviewed about 600 people including local residents.

Based on their surveys and interviews, club members have confirmed the areas flooded by the tsunami and the height of the waves.

Anna Shinka, a second-year student, played a key role in creating the map. Shinka recalls that Shinmaiko beach in the city's Taira-Shimokabeya district, where she often played in her childhood, was devastated by the tsunami. She said her parents, both schoolteachers, told her how sad they feel about losing some of their students to the disaster.

She then came up with the idea of creating the map after realizing that "even high school students can do something" for disaster victims.

Her family initially voiced opposition to her activities because aftershocks continued to rattle the region and radiation levels remained high. However, she went ahead with the plan and felt the weight of her responsibility as she interviewed those who lost their family members to the tsunami.

During the surveys, club members noticed that there are differences in the extent of damage depending on areas in the city.

Tsunami waves surged up an irrigation canal in the northern Yotsukura district, flooding an extensive area along the canal.

Seawalls in the Taira-Usuiso and Taira-Toyoma districts were washed away by the tsunami and low-altitude neighborhoods in these areas were devastated.

In the Onahama district, many old houses that were not built on elevated land were flooded by the tsunami.

In the southern Yotsukura district, an anti-tide forest and the Yokokawa River helped minimize the flood. Moreover, there were few casualties in the Ena district because the local community had repeatedly conducted disaster-prevention drills involving residents.

These are discoveries that Shinka and other members of the high school club made during their survey and interviews.

Some organizations and individuals extended a helping hand to the club in creating the map.

The Iwaki Natural History Association, comprised of former members of the club, accompanied the club members in their surveys and interviews, while the Fukushima Coast Guard Office provided a bathymetric chart to the club.

Furthermore, Tohoku University professor Fumihiko Imamura, a tsunami expert, explained the mechanism of tsunami, such as propagation speeds and their directions, to them.

Shinka and other members then repeated experiments using a hand-made tsunami-generation device, and clarified what spread the damage from the tsunami.

Based on their studies, the club members created a hazard map that includes the height of seawalls and plans to utilize land for disaster-prevention measures, such as the creation of anti-tide forests.

Using the map, the club intends to make recommendations on disaster-prevention measures to the municipal government and communities hit by the tsunami and said, "The tragedy shouldn't be repeated."

TEPCO : The burden is too great

November 9, 2012

New TEPCO policy on rocks / Utility accepts responsibility for crisis, asks for more support

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/T121108004043.htm>

Hiroyuki Tanaka / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

Main measures to be carried out by TEPCO based on its “management policy toward rehabilitation”

Decommission reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and promote reconstruction work in Fukushima Prefecture	Establish a “Fukushima reconstruction head office” with 4,000 employees, where a TEPCO vice president will be stationed
	All TEPCO employees will work on a rotational basis to help affected people in Fukushima Prefecture return their lives to normal. A cumulative total of 100,000 employees will engage in the project annually.
	Study establishing a state-of-the-art coal-fired thermal power station in the Hamadori region in the prefecture
	Establish an “international research center for nuclear reactor safety”
Nuclear energy division reform plan	Establish Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee to fundamentally change and improve safety measures
	Establish an organizational system to prepare for an emergency
Streamlining of operations	Additional cost cutting by about ¥100 billion a year
	Launch procurement committee to examine individual procurement valued at ¥1 billion or more.
	Increase competitive bidding in procurement
Establishment of a revenue base	Introduce in-house company system with an eye to transition to a holding company system in the future
	Annually purchase up to 10 million tons of inexpensive liquefied natural gas, such as shale gas produced in North America.
	Promote new businesses by using smart meters, which are next-generation electric power meters
	Promote scrapping old thermal power plants with output capacity equivalent to 10 million kilowatts and build new ones

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s new management policy for rehabilitation is expected to face difficulties in the future, as the government is hesitant to consider providing additional support for the utility.

The new management policy announced Wednesday by TEPCO makes clear the utility's responsibility for the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and stipulates that the firm will focus on reconstruction work in Fukushima Prefecture.

The plan also says TEPCO will ask the government to consider new support measures to help it bear the costs of the decommissioning of the Fukushima plant's reactors and decontamination work in affected areas.

"In order to fulfill the responsibilities for issues such as compensation for victims of the crisis and decommissioning of the reactors, we definitely need the government's special consideration," TEPCO Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe said at a press conference Wednesday.

The compilation of the new management policy was led by TEPCO board members from outside the firm. The government was involved in the selection of the outside directors, and all seven outside directors, including Shimokobe, attended the press conference.

Based on the new management policy, TEPCO said it would establish its reconstruction head office in Fukushima Prefecture as early as January, and Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, TEPCO's new executive vice president, will be appointed to head the new office and work onsite.

By establishing the new office, to be staffed with 4,000 employees, TEPCO will beef up the smooth payment of compensation as well as its decontamination work. The utility also plans to establish an institution in the prefecture to study how to promote the decommissioning of the Fukushima plant's reactors.

TEPCO will ask for the government to provide additional support because it is difficult for the firm to promote its management reconstruction under the current support scheme. "We don't know how many years our employees will be able to maintain their current morale," said Takao Kashitani, one of the utility's outside directors and a certified accountant.

TEPCO also said costs for compensation and decontamination work could far exceed the government's assistance limit of up to 5 trillion yen, possibly rising to more than 10 trillion yen.

Goshi Hosono, former state minister for the nuclear crisis, indicated the government would take responsibility for decontamination work in areas where annual radiation doses were 1 millisievert or more. If the plan is realized, areas where decontamination work should be carried out will be expanded. TEPCO's new estimate reflects the possible change.

At the press conference, TEPCO also announced its estimate that if the firm paid 213 billion yen every year with support from other utilities, it would take 23 years to repay 5 trillion yen to the government. "It will be difficult for just one company [to shoulder further burdens]," said Fumio Sudo, another outside director, who is an advisor to JFE Holdings, Inc.

TEPCO also plans to call for the government to review its comprehensive special business plan, which was approved by the government in May this year, as early as next spring.

The government initially planned to consider how to share responsibilities for the crisis at the Fukushima plant as early as this summer, but the plan has been shelved due to confusion surrounding the current political situation.

"We hope the government will face its responsibility squarely," Shimokobe said.

However, it is still unclear whether the government will move forward with the discussion given the current situation.

With the dissolution of the House of Representatives and the lower house election looming, if the government provides TEPCO with additional support, it could be perceived by voters as relief measures for TEPCO, prompting many government officials to express concern. "The timing is bad," a senior official at the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry said.

November 8, 2012

TEPCO suggests recovery plan / Utility seeks govt aid as it estimates reconstruction costs could double

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/T121107004327.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has asked for a fundamental review of its comprehensive special business plan, suggesting the possibility decontamination costs and compensation for victims of the accident at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant may be double the current forecast.

According to a copy of TEPCO's new management plan for rehabilitation, which was obtained by The Yomiuri Shimbun before TEPCO announced it Wednesday, the utility estimates the cost of the disaster may double from the current projection of up to 5 trillion yen.

TEPCO also vows in the plan to reinforce decontamination efforts in areas affected by the crisis and ensure compensation for victims of the nuclear accident.

However, the utility says it alone will not be able to shoulder all of the costs, requesting a new framework in which the government and TEPCO would share the financial burden.

The current special business plan was created jointly by TEPCO and the government this spring. It stipulates tasks for the rehabilitation of the company and how assistance will be provided for the utility's compensation payments.

Under the scheme, the government helps TEPCO pay compensation by providing government bonds, which can be cashed in each time the amount in a compensation lot is finalized.

The government also used 1 trillion yen in public funds to buy TEPCO shares, effectively making it a state-controlled firm.

The latest management plan was compiled by the new board members, including government-appointed Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe, to review TEPCO's rehabilitation and how compensation should be paid in the future.

Shimokobe was formerly chairman of the steering committee of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund.

The framework for assistance to the utility under the current plan is problematic because TEPCO now estimates the total cost of compensation and decontamination work may surpass the government's initial forecast of 5 trillion yen.

TEPCO's new plan predicts about 5 trillion yen in additional costs, including the cost of temporarily storing contaminated waste.

As of now, decommissioning the Fukushima plant's reactors is predicted to cost about 1 trillion yen, but TEPCO predicts the actual cost will be much higher.

TEPCO said it will not be able to singlehandedly shoulder the costs of decommissioning and other work to ensure reconstruction progress in disaster-hit areas, as the burden will be too great.

If the situation is ignored, TEPCO will effectively fail and become a company that is endlessly trying to repay government loans.

Should this happen, some observers fear TEPCO will be unable to borrow from financial institutions or effectively become a state-owned corporation wholly supported by the government.

As such state-owned corporations are managed using taxpayers' money, it is possible the financial burden on the public will increase.

However, the new plan with government support places top priority on compensation and decommissioning work at any cost.

The plan specifies all of TEPCO's 38,000 employees will work together on a rotational basis for the common goal of reconstruction.

It also states TEPCO will establish a Fukushima head office with 4,000 employees to facilitate compensation payments, reconstruction work and job-building efforts in disaster-hit areas.

Hope

November 10, 2012

Bright hope: Fukushima temple draped in lights as prayer for disaster recovery



Lights at the Shiramizu Amida hall are seen being tested in this 30-second exposure shot taken in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on Nov. 9. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121110p2a00m0na004000c.html>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- Lights have been set up at the Shiramizu Amida hall, a designated national treasure and part of a temple complex here, as local businesses pray for recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake and ongoing nuclear disaster.

At a test lighting on Nov. 9, LEDs lit up over 20 trees in the temple garden, including a large ginkgo said to be over 400 years old, and a Buddhist statue in the hall.

The hall is part of the Ganjoji temple complex, and the lights can be seen every evening through Nov. 20.

Tourists figures OK again

November 10, 2012

No. of U.S. tourists to Japan recovers prequake level

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121110p2g00m0dm021000c.html>

NEW YORK (Kyodo) -- The number of tourists from the United States to Japan has largely recovered to the level before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear accident, according to a survey by the Japan National Tourism Organization.

"Considering the effects of the yen's appreciation and the U.S. economic slowdown, we can say that the blows from the quake and the nuclear accident have almost all gone," said Yuki Tanaka, the head of the JNTO's New York office.

According to the survey based on data from the Japanese immigration authority, the number of tourists from the United States to Japan fell nearly one-third to 15,886 in April 2011, immediately after the natural calamities and the nuclear accident, from 45,739 in April 2010. But the figure rose back to 42,099 in April this year.

The number of tourists has since been fluctuating in a range of several percentage points of changes from the 2010 levels, marking a rise of 3.1 percent in June and a fall of 6.6 percent in July.

Plaintiffs to sue Gov't over Hamaoka plant

Residents demanding decommissioning of Hamaoka nuke plant to sue national gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121113p2a00m0na010000c.html>

OMAEZAKI, Shizuoka -- A group of residents here taking part in a lawsuit demanding Chubu Electric Power Co. decommission the Hamaoka nuclear plant are poised to additionally sue the central government over the case.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit -- 181 residents living near the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Station in Omaezaki, Shizuoka Prefecture -- decided on Nov. 12 to additionally file the case against the government with the Hamamatsu branch of the Shizuoka District Court by the end of January next year.

While similar lawsuits have been pending at the Tokyo High Court and the Shizuoka District Court, it is the first time for plaintiffs to sue the central government over the issue.

"The Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster has highlighted the risk of the Hamaoka nuclear plant, whose operation has been substantially supported by the national government," said Tadakazu Shiozawa, a member of the defense counsel for the plaintiffs.

Shiozawa said he will assert that **the government has an obligation to permanently shut down the Hamaoka plant because the facility poses the potential risk of infringing on the right to the pursuit of happiness stipulated under the Constitution and the personal right under the Civil Code.**

The case was first filed by residents living mainly in western Shizuoka Prefecture in May 2011. The planned suit will be the fifth filed over the case.

Strong in the Rain

November 11, 2012

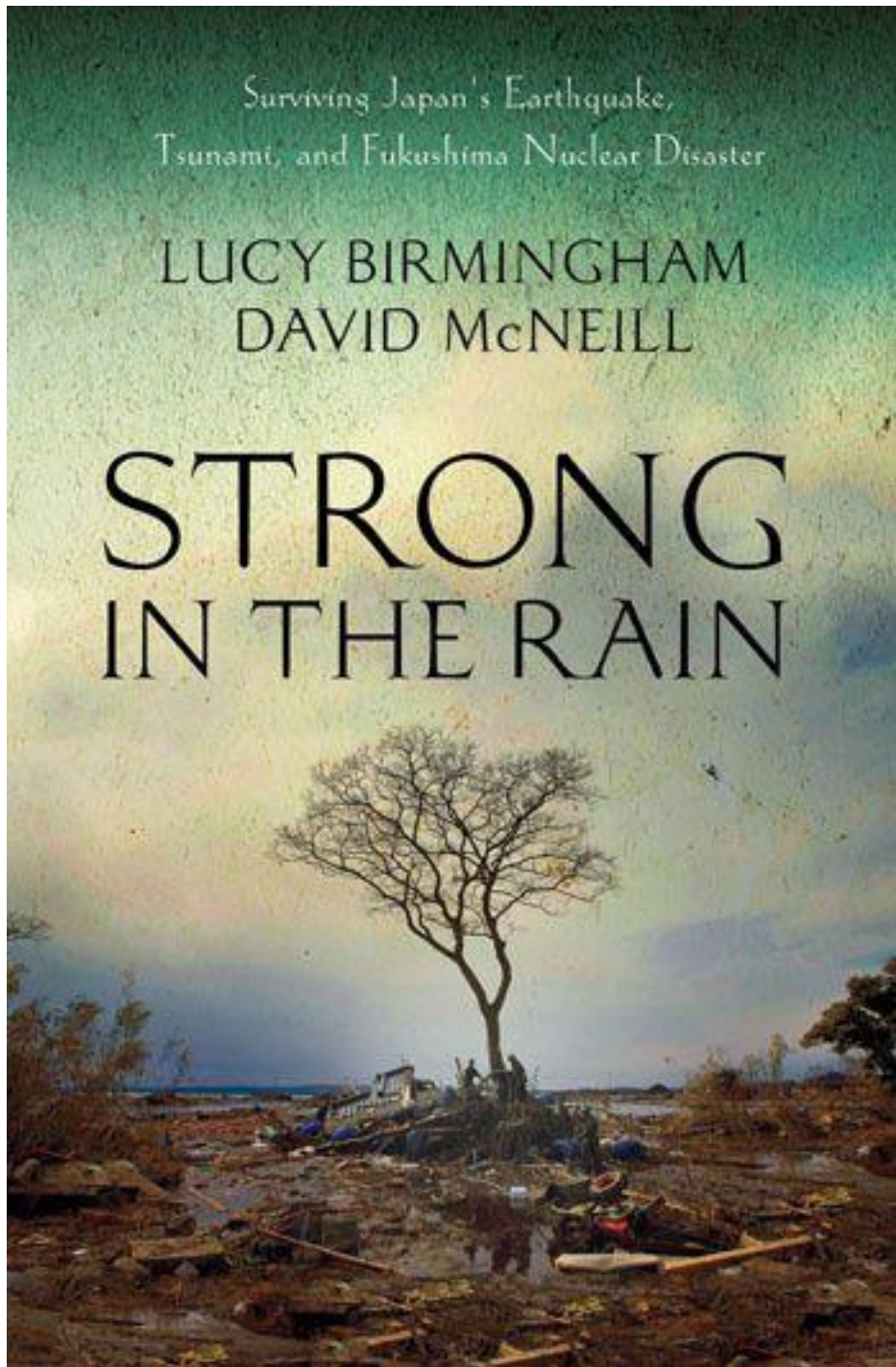
Giving voice to the survivors of the unprecedented 3/11 disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fb20121111a1.html>

By JEFF KINGSTON

STRONG IN THE RAIN: Surviving Japan's Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, by Lucy Birmingham and David McNeill. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 256 pp., \$27 (hardcover)

This is a riveting story about Japan's March 11 cataclysm told uncommonly well by two veteran Japan-based journalists who share their emotions, experiences and insights while giving readers ringside seats through captivating interviews with survivors.



The authors give a haunting voice to the people of Tohoku, one that will linger in your memory, as their evocative prose conveys a sense of the panic, horrors and heartbreak endured.

Birmingham and McNeill contrast the quiet dignity of the Japanese public with the shameful tale of risks ignored and sheer bungling by woefully unprepared government authorities and the Tokyo Electric Power Co. With the acquiescence of Japan's "nuclear village" of pro-nuclear advocates, Tepco shortchanged safety and ruined the lives of tens of thousands of Fukushima residents.

The strength of this book lies in the narratives of six individuals and how they responded to this cascading disaster. We learn of the near-death experience of an American English teacher whose school was hit without warning. Then there is a fisherman who dashed from his bath to race his boat to safety, returning a day later to what was left of his tsunami-pulverized village. We also meet Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, who broadcast an appeal for help on YouTube and vaulted to global fame. Sakurai considers himself the embodiment of the Kenji Miyazawa poem "Strong in the Rain" about a persevering and selfless individual. These are valued virtues that were tested by the triple disaster all over Tohoku and beyond. It must be said that ordinary Japanese collectively passed this test with flying colors even as the political, bureaucratic and utility elite floundered so egregiously.

Perhaps the most intriguing character is a plant employee at Fukushima No. 1 who grew up in Okuma in the shadow of the reactors. As a local high school graduate, being a maintenance worker at the nuclear plant was the best job going. At least it seemed so until 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011, when he was just leaving work. Like other town residents he evacuated to a shelter, but returned to what he describes as a battlefield where he and colleagues desperately worked in dangerous conditions to bring the nuclear disaster under control.

The tsunami stones that dot the coast of Tohoku should have been sufficient warning about the folly of building nuclear reactors close to the coastline. Massive tsunami are not black swan, once-in-a-thousand-year events; they walloped Tohoku in 1933, 1896, 1793 and twice in the 17th century. The authors write: "[T]he sense of danger diminishes after the passing of each tsunami-free decade. Each generation builds stone monuments at the highest point of the tsunami that struck their homes, then forgets their lessons; their faded stone lettering a metaphor for collective amnesia."

Some residents grew complacent behind large seawalls, wrongly believing these concrete behemoths would keep them safe. The \$1.6 billion seawall in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, was finished in 2009 after 31 years of work, but it didn't protect the local residents — over 1,000 died — and it also deflected the waves' power to neighboring villages with devastating effect. But that isn't stopping the town from rebuilding this cement folly.

The three meltdowns at Fukushima were caused by a station blackout, a total loss of power that meant that the critical cooling systems could not operate. Government regulators warned the utilities about the

need to beef up backup energy systems, but the utilities remained heedless about the dangers. The authors suggest that the earthquake may have damaged the reactor cooling systems before the tsunami inundated backup generators. Tepco has fiercely denied this possibility because if it is true then all of the utilities face high costs of retrofitting their reactors to upgrade seismic safety. It is disconcerting to read that the off-site emergency command center proved useless, that evacuations had not been practiced to avoid alarming local residents and that Tepco executives were clueless in coping with the emergency because they had routinely downplayed risks and believed their own propaganda. Tepco President Masataka Shimizu led government leaders to believe that the utility was ready to abandon Fukushima, and then he irresponsibly went AWOL, failing to take command. The government also failed to use data on radiation dispersal that could have averted the evacuation of local residents to radiation hot spots.

The Japanese media missed the meltdown story until Tepco finally came clean at the end of May 2011. "Strong in the Rain" shows a captive media towing the official line, relying on Tepco and government officials eager to downplay the extent of the accident. NHK kept nuclear critics at arm's length and relied extensively on openly pro-nuclear experts. It took far too long for the mainstream media to break a story that the foreign media had reported soon after March 11. Japan's press club system tends to co-opt journalists while the authors also suggest that the massive advertising budgets of the utilities kept critical reporting in check until the evidence became overwhelming. Aside from caving into the powers that be, the authors allege that Japanese journalists were also risk-averse, avoiding the Fukushima evacuation zone.

For many Japanese, March 11 is an ongoing nightmare. Evacuees may have to wait four decades before they return to what had been their homes. And throughout the tsunami zone, residents are trying to rebuild lives and communities, but recovery has been very slow, yet another reason for growing exasperation with the central government.

Jeff Kingston is the director of Asian Studies at Temple University, Japan campus.

TEPCO sued for having Fukushima residents' "homeland stolen"

November 15, 2012

41 Fukushima residents demand 20 million yen each from TEPCO for 'theft of homeland'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121115p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Forty-one people from areas within 30 kilometers of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant will jointly sue the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) for around 1.08 billion yen on Dec. 3, it was revealed by their lawyers on Nov. 14.

According to the lawyers, the plaintiffs will seek 20 million yen per person as **compensation for having their "homeland stolen and integrity as a human being destroyed,"** when they bring their suit to the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court.

The amount was determined through comparison with a ruling in a previous case involving the forced quarantine of leprosy patients. It also factored in 500,000 yen per person for emotional damage, and around 16 million yen per person for real-estate damage. Money will also be sought for lost profits from the inability to farm or work, and for living expenses during life as evacuees. The 41 plaintiffs have abandoned any idea of returning to their homes near the plant, the lawyers say.

The plaintiffs have already sought compensation from TEPCO four times, but have alone received small amounts in line with the company's compensation policies, the lawyers say.

Naoko Kanai, 48, who evacuated with her family and now is a leader for the plaintiff group, says, "Going to court was the only option to stop more people from suffering."

Speeding up relocation

November 18, 2012

Easier ways introduced to expedite relocation, rebuilding in tsunami-hit areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121118p2a00m0na002000c.html>

In many areas hit hard by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, little headway has been made in local municipalities' purchase of private land, which generates valuable funds for disaster victims to build new homes. Twenty months have passed since the disasters took place, and municipalities are beginning to implement new ways to speed up the process lest the current deadlock cause further delays in recovery efforts.

On March 11 of last year, tsunami tore down approximately 3,700 homes and other structures in the Iwate Prefecture town of Otsuchi. Areas that were waterlogged are now deserted lots with overgrown weeds and cement foundations. Toshihiro Aoki, 61, an adviser in the Otsuchi Municipal Government's urban development division, who was also involved in Kobe's recovery from the 1995 Great Hanshin

Earthquake as a staff member of the Kobe Municipal Government, says, "If we continue trying to find all the landowners, we'll never be able to get the recovery process going."

Making use of the national government's Special Financial Support for Promoting Group Relocation for Disaster Mitigation, the Otsuchi government is aiming to collectively relocate some 1,300 households in the town's central six districts, including Machikata and Akahama, to higher ground or further inland. To prevent homes from being built on the vacated land, the town government will institute ordinances designating the areas as disaster danger zones and buy up the land. Residents are seeking prompt land sales in hopes of using that money to build new homes. However, boundaries between properties have proven ambiguous, making it difficult to determine property size in many areas.

Cadastral maps created when land-tax reforms were made during the Meiji Period exist, but due to inferior surveying techniques and underreporting of property areas by residents trying to minimize required tax payments, the boundaries and topography of the maps often do not reflect reality. Registered land area sometimes does not match up to the land area of the actual property, either.

If new cadastral surveys were complete, the town government could have bought up the land even if the property boundaries were unclear, using registers. However, as of the end of March, there was a mere 43 percent progress rate of cadastral surveys in Otsuchi. While surveys in areas eligible for the Special Financial Support for Promoting Group Relocation for Disaster Mitigation program had made some progress, of the approximately 40 hectares of land eligible for buy-up from the municipal government, the precise land area of about 20 percent remained unclear.

Usually for such land, boundaries are drawn and the land area measured in the presence of the landowner. However, in a town where over 1,200 of its residents perished from the quake and tsunami, many landowners have either died or are missing. Identifying and tracking down whomever inherited the land, and reaching agreements for the town to purchase the plots would take significant time and energy. Moreover, if the landowner is not found, it makes it impossible to establish the land area of adjacent properties. This, in turn, could potentially prevent the town from buying up land from residents who wish to participate in collective relocation.

Faced with this dilemma, the Otsuchi government adopted a prorated method of area determination, in which it splits actual land area up among landowners depending on the ratio of land they own according to registers. It was a last-ditch method born of desperate circumstances, and can be carried out without the landowners being present.

"We keep making corrections as we proceed with our relocation program," Aoki says. "I think that residents can feel more at ease when they can actually get a sense that reconstruction efforts are moving along."

The Miyagi Prefecture capital of Sendai, meanwhile, where less than 30 percent of necessary cadastral surveys have been carried out, has also begun its own method of land area determination to buy up land

that will be vacated due to residents' collective relocation. Omitting the need for some 2,400 landowners (of approximately 3,400 plots) to be present at boundary drawings, the Sendai Municipal Government has restored provisional boundaries based on surveys conducted according to cadastral maps and road registers. Time is saved by obtaining approval from landowners for land purchases by sending them the information on the property area calculated from this data.

In addition, Sendai has managed to shorten the real-estate appraisal process, which normally takes about two to three months, to one month, by simplifying the assessment method and assignment of real-estate appraisers.

"We hadn't planned to start signing sales contracts with landowners until after the new year," says a Sendai city official, "but if all goes smoothly, we may be able to before the end of this year."

Cards for foreigners in case of evacuation

November 19, 2012

Tokyo's Hachioji creates disaster evacuation cards in multiple languages

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121119p2a00m0na004000c.html>

The Hachioji International Association in suburban Tokyo has created help cards in multiple languages to assist foreigners in finding evacuation sites in case of disaster.

The cards include spaces to write the language one is using, one's blood type and one's embassy phone number, and are available in Japanese, English, Chinese, Spanish and Korean. They come together with maps to the 17 evacuation centers in the city.

According to the Hachioji Municipal Government, there are around 9,000 foreigners in the city from 94 countries. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, local officials were contacted by foreigners saying they did not understand the way to evacuation shelters or didn't know when rolling blackouts would occur.

Following deliberations that started in summer last year, a support center for foreigners was set up within the international association, and it was also decided to send translation volunteers to evacuation shelters in case of disaster. The evacuation cards and maps were created in September this year, and 5,000 sets were printed.

There are around 150 people at the evacuation center helping with translation in seven languages, but only around 30 are expected to be able to help at evacuation shelters, so the association intends to hire more people.

"In addition to conducting recruitments and training, we will distribute the cards to foreigners and prepare against disasters," said association head Ken Saito.

The cards can be obtained at the association or at the city office. There are also plans to distribute the cards at temples and mosques.

No more nuclear tax for TEPCO

November 21, 2012

Fukushima to ax nuclear fuel tax

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121121a7.html>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA — The Fukushima Prefectural Government will abolish a nuclear fuel tax imposed on two power plants operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., with an eye to having both decommissioned.

Gov. Yuhei Sato said Monday the prefecture seeks the decommissioning of all reactors, including the three that suffered meltdowns in March 2011 at the six-reactor Fukushima No. 1 power plant, as well as the nearby four-reactor Fukushima No. 2 plant.

The tax will be abolished Dec. 30 when the five-year renewal period ends, Sato said. Fukushima will become the first prefecture hosting nuclear plants to abolish the nuclear fuel tax.

The decision was made "in light of the calls of the prefectural government and assembly for the decommissioning of all reactors in the prefecture," Sato said.

Tepco already plans to decommission Fukushima No. 1's reactors 1 through 4.

It has yet to decide on whether to decommission reactors 5 and 6 reactors at the complex and the four units at the Fukushima No. 2 plant.

November 20, 2012

Fukushima Prefecture to abolish nuclear fuel tax

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121120p2a00m0na003000c.html>

The Fukushima Prefectural Government announced Nov. 19 that it will abolish a nuclear fuel tax imposed on Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), becoming the first prefecture to do so among the 13 in Japan that impose such taxes.

The prefectural government and the Fukushima Prefectural Assembly have sought to abolish all nuclear reactors in the prefecture following the meltdowns at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. As the tax is imposed on the premise of restarting nuclear reactors, the prefectural government decided to abolish it.

The prefecture established an ordinance on the nuclear fuel tax in 1977, and renewed it every five years. The current ordinance, which went into effect in 2007, is set to expire on Dec. 30 this year, but the prefectural government and assembly will not take action to renew it or propose other related ordinances.

The prefectural government collected a total of around 124.68 billion yen through the regional tax, which corresponds to the price and weight of fuel rods that are added to reactors. The tax peaked at roughly 7.9 billion yen in fiscal 1987. The money was reportedly used to maintain evacuation routes in 10 municipalities -- those hosting the power plant and surrounding areas.

TEPCO paid the prefecture about 800 million yen in nuclear fuel taxes for the insertion of fuel rods into the No. 4 reactor at the Fukushima No. 2 Nuclear Power Plant in February 2011, a month before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear disaster. No nuclear fuel tax has been imposed in the prefecture since then.

Two more utilities want to increase rates

November 22, 2012

Kansai, Kyushu utilities to apply for rate hikes

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20121122a1.html>

Kansai Electric Power Co. plans to apply for government approval as early as Monday to hike its household electricity rates by more than 10 percent next spring, sources said.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. plans to apply for a similar rate hike Nov. 27 and is considering a household rate increase of around 10 percent, the sources said Tuesday.

The utilities hope to implement their rate increases in April, and are also considering rate hikes for corporate customers, according to the sources. The two companies will hold board meetings Monday and Nov. 27 to make a decision on the increases.

The hikes are intended to deal with soaring fuel costs for thermal power generation while the two power companies' nuclear reactors remain suspended in light of the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Only two reactors, at Kepco's Oi complex in Fukui Prefecture, have been restarted since the March 2011 nuclear catastrophe started.

The government will decide whether to approve their requests after assessing fuel, labor and other costs that form the basis for calculating electricity rates.

Kepco and Kyushu Electric were both highly dependent on atomic energy to meet demand in their service areas. In the April-September first half of fiscal 2012, Kepco logged a record net loss of ¥116.7 billion and Kyushu Electric posted a record net loss of ¥149.5 billion.

The presidents of the two utilities said in late October that rate increases were being studied. Among other power utilities, Tepco increased its rate for corporate users by 14.9 percent on average in April and its household rate by 8.46 percent in September.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co. may also consider increasing rates if their reactors remain offline for a long time.

Miyagi's life in photos

November 23, 2012

Archive captures life in Miyagi 1 year after disaster

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121122003742.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

SENDAI--Tohoku University has launched a website to archive 13,760 images taken by local residents that capture how areas in Miyagi Prefecture have recovered one year after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami.

Some of the photos show areas still covered in piles of debris, while others show areas currently undergoing restoration work. The national university plans to add more photos to the archive to show the public how the areas are recovering from the disaster.

The site was created by a group led by Prof. Fumihiko Imamura of the university's International Research Institute of Disaster Science.

The group called on residents living along the prefecture's coast to join a team called "Michinoku Ima no Tsutae-tai" (Team to report on the current Michinoku). Michinoku is another term for the Tohoku region. Members took photos of their areas from February to March.

One such picture shows a pile of debris sitting on the shore, while another shows a sign set up at a farm indicating work was being conducted to remove salt from a tsunami-engulfed area. Yet another picture focuses on a poster for a concert to cheer up residents living in temporary housing.

Creating the digital archive is part of the institute's project, "Michinoku Shin-Roku-Den" (Recording and sharing about quake-stricken Michinoku). The project aims to record and archive a variety of information--from life in the affected areas to residents' experiences--so lessons learned from the disaster can be utilized in future disaster management measures.

"We hope people nationwide will look at how the disaster-stricken areas are recovering," said Associate Prof. Akihiro Shibayama, who is in charge of the project.

The photos are available online at <http://michinoku.irides.tohoku.ac.jp/tsutaetai/MichinokuInfo.html>.

We all live in a very fragile world

November 11, 2012

Invaluable reference work on damage from March 11 disasters

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fb20121111a2.html>

By YUNG-HSIANG KAO

PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE REPORT OF THE 2011 TOHOKU-CHIHO TAIHEIYO-OKI EARTHQUAKE, edited by the Architectural Institute of Japan. Springer, 2012, 460 pp., \$179 (hardcover)

The March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake was notable for the widespread damage caused by seismic activity, the tsunami devastation and the nuclear accident at Fukushima. This reference work, an English translation of the Architectural Institute of Japan's July 2011 report, deals with the first two issues, while acknowledging the difficulty of conducting the survey in areas near the nuclear power plant.

Geared toward professionals such as architects, engineers, geologists, other scientists and those dealing with seismic technology, the book is also accessible to the common, interested reader as roughly half the volume consists of photographs supplemented by graphs and charts.

Some of the most striking photographs include an image of a collapsed wood house with the roof intact in Osaki, Miyagi Prefecture; the damage to the exterior wall of an office building due to the damaged internal ceiling; and damage to the pile foundations of an apartment building in Sendai, causing it to lean slightly like the tower in Pisa, Italy.

One photo of collapsed ceiling panels in a Tohoku auditorium is followed by a mention that similar damage occurred in far-away areas such as Kanagawa Prefecture. For example, the Muza Kawasaki Symphony Hall was heavily damaged by the earthquake and is due to reopen only in April 2013.

Other photographs reveal the tsunami damage, show how some architectural devices to deal with earthquakes responded to the vibrations, or illustrate specific construction issues, such as a section on reinforced hollow concrete masonry buildings showing two images from Sendai, one building without damage, the other partly collapsed.

Living and working near Tokyo Bay, the graphs on reclamation and liquefaction around the area were highly informative.

Divided into 11 chapters, the book covers all areas of specialized interest, with sections for timber buildings, steel buildings, various kinds of reinforced concrete buildings, nonstructural elements and damage to the soil and foundation. The two appendixes are invaluable for professionals as they contain formulas for seismic and tsunami wave force calculations and information about Japanese building codes.

Educational, impactful and comprehensive, the book is a necessary addition to the professional's bookshelf. For others, it would be a suitable reference work to look through at a library to gain some knowledge of how fragile the constructed world we live in is in the face of nature.

12% increase for KEPCO?

November 25, 2012

Kepeco eyes 12% household rate hike

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121125a7.html>

Kyodo

OSAKA — Kansai Electric Power Co. is planning to hike its household electricity rates by around 12 percent on average from next April, according to industry sources.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. also intends to raise its household rates by an average of 8.5 percent from the April 1 start of the next fiscal year, the sources said Friday.

Kepeco plans to apply Monday for government approval of its first rate hike since 1980, while Kyushu Electric will likely follow suit Tuesday.

The two companies are seeking to increase rates because they, along with other utilities nationwide, are struggling in the face of sky-rocketing fossil fuel costs amid from the protracted suspension of nuclear reactors.

Both Kepeco and Kyushu Electric reported huge group net losses for the April-September first half of fiscal 2012, largely due to soaring fuel costs.

However, they could be forced to reduce their envisioned hikes after an expert panel under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry reviews their applications.

As for corporate rates, Kepeco hopes to raise charges by around 20 percent on average and Kyushu Electric by approximately 15 percent, according to the sources. Rate hikes for businesses do not require government approval.

A business plan Kepeco is scheduled to unveil Monday assumes the company will be granted approval to restart two of its reactors at the Takahama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture, the sources said. The utility resumed operations at two of its units at the Oi nuclear power station, also in Fukui, earlier this year.

Kepeco is seeking to return to profitability in fiscal 2013 by slashing personnel costs and implementing other streamlining measures, according to the sources.

Kyushu Electric's proposed rate hike is based on the assumption that it will be able to fire up four of six suspended reactors at two nuclear power stations as early as the next fiscal year, the sources said.

The utility is also planning to reduce manpower expenses as part of efforts to absorb soaring power generation costs, they said.

Allow outside companies to rebuild?

November 26, 2012

Few outside firms join rebuilding / Despite govt scheme to encourage joint ventures in disaster-hit areas

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121125003469.htm>

Very few construction companies outside the three prefectures devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake have participated in the reconstruction of the region despite a government program meant to encourage them to do so.

The program encourages outside companies to form joint ventures with companies in the prefectures that do not have enough manpower to deal with the reconstruction work.

The Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry introduced the scheme in this fiscal year for Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures.

But in many cases, local governments are reluctant to utilize the program. Only four contracts have been signed under the plan, the ministry has found, less than 1 percent of all orders awarded for post-disaster reconstruction work.

There has been a shortage of bids for public reconstruction work in the disaster-hit areas--about 25 percent of such project offers have not drawn any bids.

The ministry will consider measures to improve the situation. About 20 percent of approximately 3,200 orders for construction work placed last fiscal year in the three prefectures could not be filled, including some for the city of Sendai, according to the ministry. Some of the orders did not attract any bidders because there is a shortage of engineers who can manage work sites.

Therefore, the ministry introduced the special joint venture scheme for reconstruction work to encourage companies outside the three prefectures to enter the market.

Compared with conventional joint venture schemes, regulations on dispatching engineers have been relaxed. If a local construction company is short of workers, it can win public works orders by joining hands with a construction company outside the three prefectures.

But the plan has been used only in Miyagi Prefecture. In Iwate Prefecture, only companies based in the prefecture are allowed to participate in joint ventures. In Fukushima Prefecture, the prefectural government has not introduced the special program, saying orders from the prefectural government should go to local companies.

There were 1,280 bids for reconstruction-related public works in the three prefectures between April and September this year, according to the ministry.

But only 87 bids in Miyagi Prefecture were held under the new scheme, and only four contracts were signed. The percentage of orders that could not find contractors in the three prefectures this fiscal year has already reached 24 percent, up five percentage points from last fiscal year. Though resolving the problem of the shortage of construction companies is an urgent task as full-fledged reconstruction works start, a ministry official said, "Contrary to our expectations, **the scheme has not been sufficiently utilized.**"

Prof. Toshihiko Hayashi of Doshisha University, an expert on economic policies, said: "It's the prerogative of the local governments to decide whether to let companies based in other prefectures participate in reconstruction work to speed up the work or to place priority on protecting the interests of local companies.

"But it's the disaster victims who are forced to endure the inconvenience. It's necessary to think about how long local governments can make the victims wait."

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Work must not be delayed

By Shigetaka Mori / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

One reason why the special reconstruction joint venture scheme has not been utilized is that local companies are wary about companies from other prefectures entering their market, and the local governments have deferred to their fears.

In placing public works orders, local governments in general limit eligible bidders to local companies to boost local industries.

Because the joint venture scheme temporarily relaxes the limits, it contains a risk for local companies.

An official of the Miyagi General Construction Association said, "In the disaster-hit areas, profit margins are low because costs for material procurement and labor have been rising."

Commenting on reconstruction tie-ups with outside companies, the official said, "It's meaningless to jointly win contracts if you have to spend so much time and effort to do so."

An official of a construction company in Fukushima Prefecture said, "If companies of other prefectures enter this market, it will lead to excessive price-cutting competition."

Although it is important to consider local companies, it should not be done at the expense of delaying reconstruction.

Concerned entities need to consider the best way forward by taking into account the interests of all of the disaster-hit areas.

Looking to increasing the price of electricity

November 27, 2012

Kyushu Electric seeks approval for rate increase

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121127_33.html

Kyushu Electric Power Company in southwestern Japan is seeking government approval for an average 8.51 percent increase in household electricity rates from April of next year.

The utility cites difficult business conditions, as its nuclear plants were suspended after the Fukushima accident last year.

President Michiaki Uriu submitted an application for the rate increase to the Natural Resources and Energy Agency on Tuesday.

The company also informed the agency of its plan to raise its rates for large-volume users by an average of 14.22 percent from April. The setting of fees for large lot users is liberalized and does not require government approval.

Uriu told reporters that fuel costs for thermal power generation rose drastically as a result of shutting down the nuclear power plants.

He also indicated that more rate hikes are possible if the nuclear plants remain offline for a prolonged period of time.

Kyushu Electric is the third utility to request a rate increase due to rising costs stemming from the suspension of nuclear power plants. Tokyo Electric raised its rates in September, and Kansai Electric filed a request to raise its rates on Monday.

All of Japan's nuclear power plants were shut down after the Fukushima accident last year, and only 2 reactors have come back online since then.

3 other power companies are considering raising their rates.

Kepeco applies for 12% household rate hike in April

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121126x3.html>

Kyodo

Kansai Electric Power Co. asked the government for permission Monday to hike household electricity rates by an average 11.88 percent from April 1, after seeing its business worsen due to rising fuel costs from running thermal power plants to make up for the loss of atomic energy.

The Osaka-based utility would become the first after Tokyo Electric Power Co. to resort to rate hikes since Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant suffered three reactor meltdowns last year, effectively putting the nation's nuclear power network on idle amid safety concerns and a new regimen requiring mandatory stress tests.

Other utilities that have relied relatively heavily on nuclear power as a source of energy before the crisis started are likely to take similar actions, possibly leading to rate hikes nationwide and causing more downward pressure on the economy.

If Kepeco is allowed to raise household charges, it would be its first rate hike based on a thorough cost review since 1980.

Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yukio Edano, who has the authority to approve the rate hike, said earlier that METI will "strictly examine" the costs the utility seeks to pass on to consumers.

The utility also announced the same day it plans to raise electricity rates for corporate users by an average 19.23 percent from April, a move that does not require government approval.

Kepeco owns 11 reactors, but only two of them, at its Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture, are currently online. No other reactors are operating in the country and prospects are unclear over when, or if, any will be restarted.

Yet Kepeco's rate hike plan is based on the assumption that two reactors at its Takahama plant, also in Fukui, will be reactivated.

According to a senior official of the utility, restarting the two reactors will help the utility cut about ¥160 billion in fuel costs annually.

Kepeco reported a group net loss of ¥116.79 billion for the April-September period, its biggest net loss for the half-year period.

In the case of Tepco, it first applied to raise household rates by an average 10.28 percent but was asked to trim the hike to 8.46 percent following government screening.

Kansai Electric applies for rate increase

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121126_25.html

A utility in western Japan is asking the government to approve an average 11.88 percent price increase in household electricity. It is citing the need to cover higher costs stemming from the suspension of nuclear power plants.

Kansai Electric Power Company President Makoto Yagi filed the application on Monday at the Natural Resources and Energy Agency. The utility wants to raise household electricity bills from next April.

Yagi told the agency that his firm is also considering raising the rate for large capacity corporate users by roughly 19 percent on average from next April. The set up of fees for large lot users are liberalized and do not require government approval.

Yagi said the utility is trying to streamline management, but has no way but pass on surging fuel costs for thermal power plants to consumers.

All of Japan's nuclear power plants suspended operations for safety checks after the nuclear accident in Fukushima last year. Only 2 reactors have since gone back online, and they are both owned by the Kansai Electric.

If approved, Kansai Electric will implement its first major rate increase in 33 years.

However, the government has said it will examine the application to see whether Kansai Electric is thoroughly cutting costs such as personnel expenditures. It remains unclear whether the government will approve the requested rate increases.

Rush is on to raise power rates

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20121126a2.html>

Moves to raise electricity rates are spreading among the nation's major power companies. In September, Tokyo Electric Power Co. raised fees for electricity used by households. Following this, Kansai Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. expressed the desire to raise their electricity charges. Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co. do not rule out the possibility of raising their charges.

Behind this situation is the suspension of nuclear power plant operations following the 3/11 triple disasters. The increase in the costs of importing fuel for thermal power plants, which are substituting for nuclear power plants kept offline, has caused power companies' business performance to deteriorate.

Eight of the nation's 10 major power companies — excepting Hokuriki Electric Power Co. and Okinawa Electric Power Co. — suffered net losses in a half-year business period through the end of September 2012.

If power companies file applications for rate increases, the government should strictly scrutinize their cost structure in a transparent manner. It should call on them to reduce salaries and welfare benefits for employees because, in most cases, average salaries exceed those reported among Japan's major companies.

Fuel costs for thermal power plants borne by the nation's major power companies jumped some 40 percent from the April-September 2011 period to some ¥3.5 trillion. Business results deteriorated badly among power companies that had a relatively high reliance on nuclear power generation before 3/11.

Chubu Electric Power Co., Hokuriku Electric Power Co. and Chugoku Electric Power Co., whose nuclear reliance was relatively small, and Okinawa Electric Power Co., which has no nuclear power plants, are not expected to seek rate hikes.

Power companies think that if their nuclear power plants are put online again, they can avoid raising electricity charges. But it is impossible to restart the nuclear power plants at least until July 2013, when the Nuclear Regulatory Authority is expected to come up with new, post-Fukushima safety standards.

There are other factors that contribute to pushing up electricity fees. In July, a system started under which power companies must buy power generated by renewable electricity sources at fixed prices. They are allowed to pass these costs on to consumers.

In October, an environment tax imposed on all forms of fossil fuel was introduced. This tax is also passed on to consumers. **It will be necessary to change the current electricity fee system under which power companies are allowed to pass increased costs on to consumers in order to secure a profit margin.**

The government should work out ways to increase competition in the power industry by making it easier and cheaper for small-scale power generation companies to use power transmission lines owned by major power companies, which enjoy regional monopoly.

TEPCO's Fukushima Revitalization headquarters

November 29, 2012

TEPCO's Fukushima office to be established at accident response site

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121129p2g00m0dm079000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to set up its Fukushima headquarters at a soccer training center that has been used as a base for operations to grapple with the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi complex, sources close to the matter said Thursday.

The utility has announced that it will establish the "**Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters**" in January to accelerate compensation payments to people affected by the crisis and work to clean the surrounding land contaminated with radiation.

The center called "J-Village" is located in the towns of Naraha and Hirono, about 20 kilometers from the Fukushima Daiichi plant, where three reactors suffered meltdowns. It was originally donated by TEPCO for regional development purposes, with construction costs totaling 13 billion yen.

But following the nuclear crisis triggered on March 11, 2011, J-Village became a key location for the handling of the crisis, such as providing a space for workers to don protective clothing before heading to the plant and to undergo radiation surveys afterward.

The Fukushima headquarters will be led by TEPCO Executive Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki.

Concern about Kepco's rate rise

November 28, 2012

Kepeco's electricity bill increase has industries worried

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20121128a2.html>

OSAKA — Companies operating in Kansai Electric Power Co.'s service area are voicing strong concern about the utility's plan to raise its rates.

Kepeco said Monday it will raise rates for corporate customers by an average of 19.23 percent starting in April while seeking government approval for a planned hike of 11.88 percent on average for households. It says the increases are necessary to cover soaring fuel costs while thermal power generation makes up for its halted reactors.

The rate hike "will be very tough for industries that consume large amounts of electricity and for small businesses," said Yoshio Tateishi, head of the Kyoto Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Officials at Sharp Corp., which has many core plants in Kepco's service area, said the 19 percent hike will increase its annual costs by nearly ¥2 billion. "We need to come up with measures to offset the expected cost increase," a Sharp executive said. "We have no choice but to make our own efforts."

Panasonic Corp. said the recent energy price increases are no longer acceptable.

It warned that Kepco's rate hike will have a major impact on manufacturers and could lead to the hollowing-out of the nation's industries.

West Japan Railway Co. is worried about a possible decline in the number of business passengers on its bullet trains.

"We were affected by the financial crisis of 2008. We are concerned about Kansai Electric's rate hike because the passenger traffic depends very much on the state of economy," a JR West official said.

Hiromasa Yonekura, chairman of the Keidanren business association, said the rate hike is unavoidable because Kepco now has only two of its 11 reactors operating and faces huge thermal power generation costs.

Stressing the importance of utilities' financial well-being to ensure stable power supplies across the country, Yonekura said both individuals and businesses should support power companies. He reiterated that more halted reactors should be reactivated.

Facing reporters in the city of Fukushima, Yasuchika Hasegawa, head of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai), also said Kepco's hike is unavoidable.

Kiseki, the miracle dog

November 28, 2012

Nuclear zone holdouts, old dog 'Miracle' live on

By KOJI HARADA

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121128f2.html>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Pref. — An old gaunt dog was spotted at a barn in a town in Fukushima Prefecture last August, apparently feeding off the carcasses of cattle abandoned after the nuclear disaster started in March 2011 at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Dogged persistence: Kiseki (Miracle), rescued from starvation, sits leashed to a stake Oct. 17 in the town of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture. KYODO



Naoto Matsumura, who had seen the dog, thought it a miracle that the animal had managed to survive in Tomioka, which is in the 20-km exclusion zone set up around the crippled power plant.

Residents had been ordered by the government to evacuate due to high levels of radiation.

Matsumura, 53, is one of the few who have remained and has taken it on himself to feed and care for abandoned cattle and other animals as the head of a local nonprofit organization.

A soiled collar around the dog left Matsumura pitying the animal, which was probably waiting for its owner to return. Lying motionless on the ground, the dog could not swallow water.

Matsumura feared the dog could die the next day. "A miracle must happen," he recalled thinking as he held the dog in his arms and took it to a veterinarian outside the exclusion zone.

The canine survived, but not before the vet, who mistakenly thought Matsumura was its owner, accused him of animal cruelty. Now named Kiseki (Miracle), the dog is gradually recovering but still cannot howl.

The second winter into the nuclear plant disaster is approaching in Tomioka, with unpicked persimmons littering the streets and the rivers full of salmon.

The most striking scene is fields of yellow Canada goldenrods that have taken over areas where rice and other crops once grew.

Matsumura and his friend, Kazuo Endo, 55, are busy preparing for winter, stocking up on feed for around 100 cattle. Endless laughter fills their conversations.

At times, though, Matsumura appears pensive. He has been so ever since Tomioka Mayor Katsuya Endo declared in late September that evacuated residents won't be able to come back for the next five years.

"These animals, when the residents return, will be the symbol of the town of Tomioka," Matsumura said.

Voters worry about nukes

December 5, 2012

Voters cite nuclear power worries, hopes for economy

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121205a3.html>

Kyodo

Voters had mounting concerns, including over nuclear fears and the economic slowdown, as official campaigning began Tuesday for the Dec. 16 general election.

And one place where candidates, even their campaign posters, were conspicuously absent was a former high school in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, which continues to house some 160 evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdown disaster, which started in March last year.

Evacuees from the disaster, who number in the tens of thousands nationwide, said politicians have forgotten the hardships they have had to bear even as they make the future of the nation's nuclear power program a key campaign issue for the first time.

"This is no time for an election," said Ryohei Endo, who fled to a temporary dwelling in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, after radioactive fallout from the triple-meltdown catastrophe rendered his hometown unlivable.

"Compensation and decontamination work have not progressed" since the disaster started last year, said Endo, 76, from Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, a coastal town 20 km south of the crippled plant. "I wonder how concerned (the candidates) are about people leading miserable lives like us?"

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan and Shinzo Abe, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, chose to make their first official campaign speeches in Fukushima Prefecture.

Endo said he has heard an increasing number of candidates and their supporters pitching their policies in his neighborhood since Noda dissolved the Lower House on Nov. 16. But instead of welcoming the candidates' visits, he said, "I assume they want to be Diet members for their own sake in the end."

In Tokyo, people who gathered for a stump speech said they will vote for any party that repeals the 2015 doubling of the 5 percent consumption tax that the Noda government managed to get enacted in the Diet last summer.

"If the consumption tax is increased, small and medium-size firms will go bust," said Masao Chinen, 61.

Kazuyuki Raiju said he may cast his vote for a party that promises to end nuclear power, in consideration of the 160,000 people who are still under evacuation orders due to the Fukushima crisis.

"The Fukushima nuclear plant (crisis) shows that when something like this happens, we have no means to contain it," Raiju, 64, said.

In the former high school still serving as an evacuee shelter in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, Tomoe Unuma, who runs a coffee shop in the building, said, "This place seems like a symbol of abandonment."

The building boasts no candidate campaign posters and no candidates showed up on the first morning of official campaigning.

"I am mad that people talk about (things related to) Fukushima only when there's an election. But on the other hand, I had hopes that they would listen to us," Unuma, 37, said.

New court case involving TEPCO

December 4, 2012

40 residents near Fukushima nuke plant seek 1.94 billion yen from TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121204p2a00m0na029000c.html>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- Forty local residents from 18 households near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant filed a class action lawsuit against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) on Dec. 3, demanding the utility pay damages worth about 1.94 billion yen.

The plaintiffs from Minamisoma, Futaba, Naraha and Hirono that fall within 30 kilometers from the disaster-hit nuclear power station filed the class action suit with the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court.

Tokuo Hayakawa, 73, who heads the group of plaintiffs, said at a news conference, "We won't be able to put our lives back in order with the amount of compensation decided by TEPCO, the victimizer. If things remain as they are, we (evacuees) will become abandoned citizens."

Hayakawa currently lives in a housing unit rented by the Fukushima Prefectural Government. Before the nuclear disaster, he was the chief priest at a Buddhist temple in Naraha, while running a group home and an employment facility for the intellectually-handicapped. Following the outbreak of the crisis at the nuclear plant on March 11, 2011, most of the town was designated as a no-entry evacuation zone, forcing him to evacuate and lose his quiet life.

The 97 handicapped people, who had lived in Hayakawa's group home before the nuclear disaster, evacuated to places all over the country, and some of them died while evacuating. "I want to convey our appeal through the lawsuit for the sake of our friends who cannot raise their angry voice at TEPCO and for the sake of the evacuees who were compelled to silently accept the situation."

According to the group of lawyers, never before had evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster filed such a large-scale class action lawsuit. The plaintiffs demand TEPCO pay 20 million yen each in damages for mental suffering stemming from the loss of their hometown, including their local community, among other claims.

Disaster-hit areas want candidates to hear them

December 4, 2012

Voters in disaster-hit areas take hard glance at election candidates

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121204p2a00m0na032000c.html>

As Japan gears up for a general election one year and nine months after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, voters in disaster-hit areas are scrutinizing candidates' campaign remarks and appearances in the hardest-hit areas.

Toru Kikawada, senior vice minister for reconstruction in Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's Cabinet, spoke to residents in the Iwate Prefecture city of Rikuzentakata, which was devastated by the March 2011 tsunami.

"Reconstruction doesn't happen overnight," he said, indicating that he was keen to put an effort into the reconstruction effort.

Among those listening to Kikawada was a 59-year-old store manager who lost his brother, sister-in-law and nephew to the disaster. The area where his home and store once stood remains a flattened wasteland, and a question lingered in his mind:

"Reconstruction is only beginning here. Will he stand with us until our new town is built?"

Some 1,700 lives were lost when the tsunami struck the city. Kikawada also lost his parents, wife and first son.

"Everyone else has lost family and acquaintances, too, so I don't think he'll get sympathy votes. But he should be able to side with the feelings of those hit by the disaster better than anyone," the store manager commented.

Toshiharu Kitsunai, a 70-year-old resident of Rikuzentakata, has been living with his wife in a home rented by the Iwate Prefectural Government in April last year, after the disaster swept away his own home. The two-year limit for staying in the home in the prefectural city of Ichinoseki was extended for a year, but the 70-year-old doesn't know what he'll do after that.

"I'm getting on in years, and probably won't be able to return to my hometown. I want them to focus on housing policies," he said, expressing expectations for candidates' assistance.

Hidenori Hashimoto, a 45-year-old new candidate for the Liberal Democratic Party, had his home in the city of Ofunato swept away by the tsunami. A 72-year-old woman from Rikuzentakata expressed hope in his performance.

"I think someone who has experienced the earthquake disaster will set about restoration work with a strong will," she said.

Prime Minister Noda made his first campaign speech in the Fukushima No. 5 electoral district, which covers the city of Iwaki along with six towns and two villages in the Futaba county of Fukushima Prefecture.

A 57-year-old resident living in a temporary housing complex in the city said he could feel a passion from Noda.

"I can sense his enthusiasm for reconstruction in the fact that he started his speeches in Fukushima," he said.

Before the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, the 57-year-old had been living in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha.

The town was designated as a "no-go zone" after the disaster until August this year. He had been trying to establish a brand of rice with lower reliance on agricultural chemicals when the nuclear disaster occurred, tainting the area with radioactive materials.

"I've got my hopes up on the kind of 'seed-planting' politics that will lead to restoration, and support child-rearing and the return of people to their hometowns," he said.

Other voters took a harsher view of candidates who campaigned in the disaster areas.

"Speaking in the disaster areas on the first day? It's a performance. I feel like the disaster areas have been used," commented 42-year-old temporary worker Yuko Sato.

Sato had lived in the town of Tomioka, just six kilometers from the disaster-hit Fukushima nuclear plant. In July 2011, she evacuated to an emergency temporary dwelling in Iwaki, where she now lives with four family members.

"Even if decontamination progresses, I've given up on returning," she said. Sato says she has looked over the manifestos of various political parties running in the lower house election, but that hasn't helped her. "They're all saying the same sort of thing, and in the end, I don't know in whose hands I should leave my future," she said.

Meanwhile, in the Miyagi Prefecture city of Ishinomaki, where the death toll from the earthquake disaster stood at 3,483 as of the end of October this year, with 462 listed as missing, residents' focus was on post-disaster restoration.

"It's easy to talk, but just how much will they do for us?" mumbled Sakai Miura, the owner of a nearby kimono fabric store. "The disaster hit when our sales were already falling due to the emergence of large stores in the suburbs, and there are many people who can't see a future."

TEPCO loses customers

December 7, 2012

TEPCO loses 3,350 corporate contracts after rate hike

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121207p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, said Dec. 6 it has lost 3,350 corporate contracts in the six months since it raised corporate electricity rates in April this year.

TEPCO said the loss translates into 200,000 kilowatts on a contract electric power basis. Many of the corporate customers are small-scale supermarkets and building owners and are believed to have switched to different utilities.

TEPCO Vice President Hiroshi Yamaguchi revealed the numbers during a regular press conference of the Federation of Electric Power Companies.

TEPCO and other major power companies have raised corporate and household electricity rates since April, citing poor business conditions due to rising fuel costs to make up for the loss of atomic power generation in the aftermath of the Fukushima meltdowns.

TEPCO says it has lost 15,450 corporate contracts (4.2 million kilowatts) over a 12-year-period through March this year. The loss of the 3,350 corporate contracts through Oct. 1 this year highlights an acceleration of firms quitting TEPCO.

However, TEPCO still holds more than 2 million corporate contracts. Yamaguchi told reporters, "There is no surprising change in the volume of contractual electricity," suggesting the effects of declining revenue are limited.

Better but not perfect

December 8, 2012

Lessons of 2011 led to better evacuations this time

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201212080046

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The magnitude-7.3 earthquake and tsunami warning on Dec. 7 were a chilling echo of the events of March 2011, but lessons learned back then resulted in a more efficient evacuation of residents to higher ground.

A broad stretch of eastern Japan experienced tremors measuring lower-5 on the Japanese scale of 7. Yet there were only 11 reported injuries, many sustained when evacuees fell as they fled.

The earthquake struck at 5:18 p.m. off the Sanriku coast of northeastern Japan. A tsunami warning for Miyagi Prefecture sounded at 5:22 p.m., while four other prefectures received tsunami advisories. In total, about 26,000 people moved to high ground or to designated evacuation centers.

At 7:20 p.m., the tsunami warning and advisories were canceled.

Last year's quake and tsunami devastated large sections of the Pacific coast of Honshu. In many of those areas, residents began evacuating within minutes of the latest quake.

"With people evacuating even before the tsunami warning was issued, a much faster evacuation than last year was made possible," said an official with the fire department for Kesenuma and Minami-Sanriku in Miyagi Prefecture.

One reason for the quick evacuation was that local governments had implemented changes in disaster management procedures.

For example, in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, the municipal government promptly e-mailed tsunami advisories to residents across the city.

The area-wide text messaging program was implemented in July. The Dec. 7 event was only the second time it had been used to carry a tsunami advisory, with the first being in August.

In Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, an evacuation advisory was issued for all residents in areas damaged by last year's tsunami. At the time of last year's disaster, the policy had been to urge evacuations only among people on the coast itself. Officials subsequently expanded the advisory zone to include inland areas devastated in 2011.

Meanwhile, a small change in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, was aimed at preventing a repeat of a local tragedy there: Ten local volunteer firefighters died in the district last year because they were still calling on residents when the wall of water struck. On Dec. 7, the municipal government urged firefighters to leave affected areas 10 minutes before the time the tsunami was forecast to hit.

Companies in coastal regions also acted swiftly to safeguard their workers.

A plant operated by Nippon Paper Industries Co. in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, was left devastated after last year's disasters. It is now repaired and operating again. When the tsunami warning sounded on Dec. 7, production lines halted and all workers evacuated to higher ground nearby.

"After last year's disasters, we compiled a manual that said, 'If a warning is issued, just flee.' That helped this time," said a spokesperson for Nippon Paper Group Inc.

Convenience store chain FamilyMart Co. instructed workers at about 40 outlets along the Pacific coast to evacuate, shutting the stores temporarily. Fellow operator Lawson Inc. closed 46 of its outlets, too.

But not everything went smoothly on Dec. 7.

On Dec. 3, the Kamaishi municipal government in Iwate Prefecture installed a new emergency radio system to broadcast advisories to streets and homes in the neighborhood. The new system replaced one destroyed in last year's disaster, and when tested, the installation seemed to work.

But on Dec. 7, the system's automated evacuation message failed to activate. Municipal government workers had to run up to the broadcasting booth on the fourth floor of the government building to

broadcast the evacuation advisory themselves. And in some areas the messages were not heard because equipment was still being replaced.

In Natori, Miyagi Prefecture, a siren for the tsunami warning did not operate properly.

And because the Dec. 7 quake struck at a time when many commuters were returning home from work, roads quickly became blocked with cars. One individual in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, tweeted about 50 minutes after the quake struck that traffic jams had made evacuation difficult.

Last time, many cars were swept away. This time, many local police departments formulated plans to have officers direct traffic.

The overlap of the evacuation with the evening rush hour led to **major traffic jams in a number of cities.**

Experts fear even greater "outer-rise" earthquake

December 8, 2012

Magnitude 7.3 'outer-rise' earthquake sparks fresh fears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121208p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The magnitude 7.3 earthquake that occurred off of the east of Japan on Dec. 7 was an "outer-rise" tremor, with its hypocenter located past the Japan Trench in a risen part of the Pacific plate, it has been learned.

Outer-rise earthquakes readily occur as aftershocks following large earthquakes at plate borders, like the Great East Japan Earthquake. Often the hypocenters are shallow, and when they involve a vertical sliding of faults, as in the Dec. 7 quake, they are thought to be capable of easily producing tsunami that are comparatively large for the scale of the quake.

Because of this, the Japan Meteorological Agency and tsunami experts were on heightened guard after the Great East Japan Earthquake. **The Dec. 7 quake was the second large outer-rise quake since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the first being on the same day as the disaster.**

In April this year, a magnitude 8.6 outer-rise earthquake occurred off of Sumatra, Indonesia, and may have been an aftershock of the magnitude 9.1 earthquake eight years before that caused a tsunami that took around 220,000 lives and injured around 130,000 more.

Professor Fumihiko Imamura of Tohoku University says, "I don't know when, but an even larger outer-rise earthquake could occur in the future (off the Tohoku coast). I want people to have places ready to evacuate to in case of disaster."

To run or not to run

December 10, 2012

COUNTDOWN TO DEC. 16: Fukushima still divided over radiation hazard

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201212100090

By HIROSHI MATSUBARA/ AJW Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Under the hazy rays of an early winter sun, 2,400 running buffs from around the country gathered at a track in the Haramachi district of central Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 2.

They came for the 25th anniversary of the annual "Nomaoui-no-sato health marathon" races, but the mood was much different from previous years.

An accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and concerns over radiation contamination had forced the cancellation of last year's event, and many were opposed to its resumption this year.

The event was also being held exactly two weeks before a pivotal Lower House general election, where candidates were arguing the future of the nation's nuclear power policy.

On Dec. 2, the aftermath of the Fukushima accident was foremost on the minds of officials and participants.

At the opening ceremony, Minami-Soma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai stated that he "wants participants to dispel people's concerns about health hazards."

Sakurai garnered global recognition when he made an online plea spotlighting the plight of his city's residents in the early days of the nuclear crisis following the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011.

He was later chosen among Time magazine's 100 most influential people in the world.

"People who participated in this event are all forward-looking. I hope they will demonstrate our will to fully rebuild this city," Sakurai told AJW before running in the half marathon.

The Haramachi district is located about 25 kilometers north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Following the meltdown of the plant reactors, the city instructed residents to evacuate, but things have seemingly returned to normal since the district was located outside the mandatory evacuation zone of a 20-km radius around the plant.

Still, the city's plan to resurrect the races in December last year faced extensive opposition, and schools concerned over radiation hazards to their pupils refused to send teams. The entire event was canceled.

Residents were again divided this year over whether the city should host the annual races.

On Internet message boards, opponents posted such messages such as "it is abnormal to allow 2,000 people to run through a radiation-contaminated area," the health marathon races will "only exacerbate participants' health" and "don't allow children to run."

A group of residents petitioned the mayor to cancel the event, saying it will "only increase the health risks to children and young people."

To get the races back on track, the city conducted radiation monitoring throughout the courses and made the data public. It underscored the event's significance in its official slogan "pray for recovery through sport."

On Dec. 2, the participants, including 430 elementary students, ran in competitions from 1.5-km races to a half marathon of 21 km.

Among the runners, Yuma Koizumi, an 18-year-old high school senior, finished third in the 5-km race, proudly wearing the bib of his Odaka Technical High School.

The area name Odaka has special meaning to Minami-Soma residents. The district is located at the southern end of the city and designated as the mandatory evacuation area until April.

The district's residents are still not allowed to stay in their homes overnight, and most of the businesses, schools and infrastructures remain closed.

The original campus of Koizumi's high school remains off limit as well, and it now operates in prefab, temporary school buildings in the Haramachi district.

"A lot of memories of despair and hope from the past two years came to mind while running," Koizumi said, looking back on his race. "Unfortunately, all my juniors have no experience of studying at the original campus.

"I will continue to compete as an amateur runner even after I graduate with the hope that I can help preserve the name of Odaka Technical."

Thanks to the city's decontamination work, the radiation level near the finish line was as low as lower than 0.3 microsievert per hour. In a bush only about 30 meters away, however, a Geiger counter measured a level of 0.7 microsievert.

As this level of radiation is believed to pose no health risk even on an annual basis, the city plans to host the running competition next year. But the city still has the much greater task of addressing residents' general fears of radiation contamination.

The argument over whether the city should host the athletic event underscores various layers of division among residents, created by the unprecedented nuclear disaster.

It has become increasingly difficult for residents to find a common vision for the future, as they are divided between people who have been allowed to return home and those whose neighborhoods have been declared uninhabitable.

Mothers and others who are most sensitive to radiation exposure opted to flee to areas outside Fukushima and start a new life there. Family and community ties have been cut, and residents are struggling to find common goals.

Among residents of the Odaka district, there is a widening gap in the way of thinking between residents who want to promptly return home and those who want to build a new life outside the district. Compensation that is currently being given by TEPCO to evicted residents has only been complicating the matter.

The Enei Foundry was among the first group of businesses that resumed operation in Odaka. After the city eased the eviction order for Odaka in April, the company applied for operational permission and resumed production in July.

It is possibly the "factory in operation closest to the nuclear plant," said its manager, Takahiko Enei. It is located 1.5 km northwest of the border checkpoint with Namie, which remains off limits.

The crippled nuclear plant is located only 10 km south from the checkpoint, at which police officers stand guard and regulate entry.

After the accident, major companies headquartered outside Fukushima Prefecture announced they would permanently close their plants in Odaka.

Due to the eviction order, local small and midsize manufacturers were also forced to halt operations or relocate their plants.

Enei Foundry also temporarily relocated its production lines to Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, and Iwaki, Ibaraki Prefecture. Even after its return to the original factory in Odaka, sales remain at about 40 percent of pre-earthquake levels, as it lost some clients while it operated in remote plants.

The 60 percent gap is offset by the compensation provided by TEPCO. If businesses can show a causal effect of nuclear accident-related damage to their businesses, TEPCO pays them compensation, based on the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damages.

Aside from business damages, each resident evicted from the mandatory eviction zone receives 100,000 yen (\$1,200) in compensation for psychological damages every month.

But at one point, Takahiko Enei realized that the compensation system was actually damaging his entrepreneurship. That was why he resumed operations at his factory ahead of other manufacturers in Odaka.

"The system will end sooner or later after the eviction order is completely removed. It is dangerous for a business operator to become reliant on TEPCO's compensation," he said.

Enei pointed out that many Odaka residents did not welcome the resumption of his factory, as they think it will give a reason for the city to completely rescind the eviction order and for TEPCO to cut back on compensation.

The entry restriction that lasted until April has left decontamination work and infrastructure recovery incomplete in Odaka.

Evicted residents who rely on TEPCO's compensation say that early rescission of the eviction order will only exacerbate their predicaments.

The district is yet to have its water service and sewage system restored. The head of a local wrecking company said that the industry estimates there are around 1,000 buildings that were severely damaged by the quake and tsunami and are waiting for wrecking balls.

Since April, only 30 of the buildings have been demolished, as they are contaminated with radiation and the work requires about five times more time than usual.

The decontamination operations in the district, which the central government is responsible for, has not shown any progress as the city is struggling to create temporary disposal sites for radiation-contaminated waste.

Shizuka Kume, whose family operated a store selling windows near Odaka's central business district, said many residents are concerned that the city is rushing to rescind the evacuation order, although Odaka remains virtually an uninhabitable area.

"It is their fear that the city is hurrying to remove regulations one after another," she said. "It will only benefit TEPCO, not the residents."

While the general election pending on Dec. 16, many Odaka residents said they are struggling to figure out how they will benefit politically.

Kume, 59, who currently lives in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, engages in volunteer work to distribute free water and food to local mothers with infants and expectant mothers.

Despite the municipal governments' claim that area tap water is safe, about 550 mothers line up for bottled water every week.

"When you cannot trust your government, how can you cast your vote for national politics?" Kume asked.

By HIROSHI MATSUBARA/ AJW Staff Writer

Minami-Soma - An abandoned look

Dossier 4

December 12, 2012

COUNTDOWN TO DEC. 16: Deserted Minami-Soma remains a city without hope

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201212110036

By HIROSHI MATSUBARA/ AJW Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Abandoned platforms lined with rows of weeds instead of passengers are waiting for trains that will never arrive.

Rails that once carried residents to their daily destinations fade into overgrown weeds less than 100 meters down the tracks.

On a chilly and crisp early winter day in December, JR Odaka Station in the Odaka district in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, looks as if it has been abandoned for years.

As the general election approaches on Dec. 16, the nation is enjoying a festive atmosphere, brought by the heated campaigns of more than 1,500 candidates nationwide, a record.

But no campaign car with loudspeakers blaring a candidate's name breaks the eerie silence in this small town.

No residents are present at this once-bustling station and the surrounding shopping streets. The heart-wrenching scenery could feel even more so if one imagines that this no man's land extends to all the areas in a 20-kilometer radius from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Odaka district, located on the southern end of Minami-Soma, was included in the 20-kilometer evacuation zone until the government relaxed the eviction order in April. Entry was strictly restricted, leaving decontamination work and infrastructure recovery efforts uncompleted, even today.

In April, much of Odaka, formerly an independent town of the same name, was re-designated a "zone preparing for the lifting of the evacuation order."

Residents and business operators are now allowed to freely enter their homes, but they are still prohibited from staying overnight. Most businesses and public facilities remain closed.

Fear of radiation contamination and delay in infrastructure recovery prompted about 2,000 of 14,000 registered residents in the district to move their residency registry to elsewhere.

"We used to have a small but close-knit community, but now we seem to have different thoughts in our minds," lamented Sunao Kato, a 62-year-old local barber. "There are people whose houses were completely washed away by tsunami and on the mountainside, radiation levels are prohibitively high. There are people who are growing accustomed to a life dependent on compensation from TEPCO."

While more than 50 shops and stores once operated along the district's main street, stretching 1 kilometer from Odaka Station, Kato's barbershop is the only business that had resumed operation after April this year.

Outside Kato's shop, houses and shops destroyed by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, remained almost untouched as if time had stopped. No pedestrians are seen, and only an occasional patrol car and construction vehicles pass down the main street.

"I doubt we can get people back even if this town manages to return into an inhabitable place," Kato said. Despite his pessimism, Kato retains the hope that his barbershop will provide a place where residents can hang out and forget their predicaments for an hour while they have their hair cut.

Immediately after the eviction order was relaxed in April, he filed a notification to reopen the barbershop that he inherited from his father. To help customers recapture the feeling of the former good times and temporarily escape their plights, he and his 61-year-old wife, Mikiko, restored all the equipment and interior decoration on their own.

The only difference and biggest inconvenience is that they need to pick up gallons of water for shampoo service, as water service has not reached individual households.

Every morning, the couple fill 40 PET bottles and five 20-liter plastic tanks at a nearby city office, and warm the water in electric-heated pots to rinse customers' hair.

At day's end, they drive to their new home, a temporary housing unit located in the Haramachi district in central Minami-Soma, about 10 kilometers to the south.

Some days no customer shows up, but there was a day when a record eight people came to Kato's shop, making him travel back and forth between his shop and the city office to pick up water.

"No word of gratitude is more rewarding than customers saying they could forget their realities after the disaster even if only for a few minutes," Mikiko said. "I can also forget our current plight while working at our shop."

Her husband agreed. "Throughout the year I lived and worked in Tokyo since the disaster, all I wanted to do is give haircuts to my customers in Odaka, and do the same old mindless chatter about gambling, golfing and all that."

Asked what he expects from the new government to be formed following the upcoming snap election, Sunao only said the national polls this time feel the farthest thing from his day-to-day reality.

“I think someone who is barely getting by each day without any vision for tomorrow cannot discuss national politics. It feels like a very, very remote thing,” he said.

Only when leaders of political parties, such as Liberal Democratic Party President Shinzo Abe, pledge to keep nuclear reactors online, does Sunao admit he feels a sense of frustration, realizing “they have no sympathy for the people of Fukushima.”

“Seeing our community completely split apart, I think it is just illogical to stick to nuclear power,” he said. While the radiation level in Odaka’s town center is as low as less than 0.3 microsievert per hour, the figure easily jumps tenfold if one drives about 6 kilometers southwest.

Takako Kuroki’s residence is located in the Kawabusa area near the mountainside of Odaka, where a prohibitively high radiation level is still detected and is designated as an “unlivable zone.”

Kuroki, 57, currently lives in Bando, Ibaraki Prefecture, with her mother. Her son’s family and their children, who used to live with Kuroki in Odaka, have decided to permanently settle in Tsuchiura in the prefecture.

She said that the farming family is among the many families from Odaka who were split apart in the wake of the nuclear disaster. She has about given up hope that she and her mother will be allowed to return home.

“Even if decontamination work clears the surface of the land, wind will bring back radioactive dust from the highly contaminated mountainside,” Kuroki said.

“I am not confident that I can live a life in which I will be asked whether I weigh more my love for my hometown or my health.”

This sense of frustration has prompted Kuroki to attend the anti-nuclear protest rally that is held in front of the prime minister’s office every Friday evening.

Since September she and three of her friends who live in the Kanto region as evacuees joined the rally once every month. When protesters shouted in chorus “let’s protect Fukushima,” she was moved to tears in a rare outburst of her suppressed emotions.

But her expectations that she could be reunited with many of her old acquaintances from Odaka have so far been betrayed each time.

“Unless people who lost their homes to the nuclear accident raise our voices, the government and TEPCO will not feel regret,” Kuroki said.

The campaign rallies for the Dec. 16 election so far, in which the LDP and other conservative parties are showing reluctance to promote a sudden shift away from nuclear power, is reinforcing her conviction.

“I feel very uncomfortable at seeing parties still divided over such a nonsense question of whether or not to maintain nuclear power,” Kuroki said. “They have no idea how much we are suffering.”

By HIROSHI MATSUBARA/ AJW Staff Writer

Defense Ministry 's report on SDF response to 3/11

December 15, 2012

Defense Ministry reviews Tohoku disaster response

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121215_12.html

Japan's Defense Ministry says it should emphasize the role of the Self-Defense Forces and responsibilities in responding to a major disaster, such as the one that hit the country in March 2011.

The ministry released a report on Friday reviewing how the Self-Defense Forces responded to last year's earthquake and tsunami, and the resulting nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

The number of SDF personnel mobilized exceeded 100,000 at the peak of the response activities.

The report says the SDF's wide range of operations included delivering relief supplies and transporting bodies.

But it says more support should have been extended to care for people living in shelters.

Regarding the nuclear accident, the report points to insufficient information sharing with Tokyo Electric Power Company and other related organizations.

The ministry is seeking to work out specific measures to communicate with nuclear regulators and other government offices.

In line with a proposal contained in the report, the ministry says it will purchase 4 unmanned drones to monitor reactors and radiation levels in the event of an accident. It plans to start training using the drones as early as next year.

The ministry also says it will refer to the report in drawing up an action plan for use following a major disaster.

Call for help

December 19, 2012-12-19

Group seeks donations for Fukushima girl needing heart transplant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121219p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- A group in a village of Fukushima Prefecture is seeking donations for a baby girl to undergo a heart transplant in the United States.

The Yoshida Aoi-chan o Suku Kai (Committee to Save Aoi Yoshida), is collecting money for Aoi Yoshida, a 20-month-old girl in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Hirata who has a condition called dilated cardiomyopathy, which causes the heart to become weakened and enlarged.

"We just want to enable our daughter, who has made it through many dangerous moments, to play outside," Aoi's 38-year-old mother Akiko, said.

Associate professor Arata Murakami of the University of Tokyo Hospital, where Aoi is being cared for, said that dilated cardiomyopathy causes the heart muscles to gradually grow thinner. Aoi was diagnosed with the ailment in February this year, and her condition began to worsen in July. As part of a clinical trial in August, she was fitted with a ventricular assist device to improve her blood circulation. Her condition improved but there is a high chance that long-term use of an artificial heart will result in blood clots or infections, and a heart transplant is said to be the only way to save her life.

In 2010 a revision to the Organ Transplant Law in Japan made it possible for people to donate the organs of brain-dead children under the age of 15, but there have so far only been two such donations in the country, so Aoi's parents decided to go ahead with a transplant in the U.S.

The parents received informal consent from Columbia University hospital officials to have Aoi undergo an operation, and they plan to travel to the U.S. for the operation as early as January next year. However, the

total cost of their trip and the surgery is expected to reach 165 million yen, so the family's neighbors formed the committee.

"We want to help this small life," committee head Norio Kuboki said.

Aoi's 40-year-old father, Masahiro, commented, "We wondered whether we should trouble people in these difficult times after the (Great East Japan) earthquake, but seeing my daughter's face, I couldn't give up. We would be happy for any help we can get."

Telephone inquiries (in Japanese) can be made at the Yoshida Aoi-chan o Suku Kai office at 0247-57-5562. Donations can be made by transfer to an account at the Japan Post Bank, account No. 02250-1-112497.

TEPCO presses LDP gov't for financial help

December 20, 2012

Fukushima plant operator to press LDP government for bailout

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212200042>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Embattled Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, will push for a further financial bailout from the new government taking power next week.

"A change of government does not affect the request in the least," the president of TEPCO, Naomi Hirose, told The Asahi Shimbun on Dec. 19.

The Liberal Democratic Party won a landslide victory in the Dec. 16 Lower House election, ousting the Democratic Party of Japan as the party of power.

In November, TEPCO urged the DPJ to give it additional aid, saying the total cost of the Fukushima disaster would exceed 10 trillion yen (\$119 billion), far above the current 5-trillion-yen limit on government bailouts.

TEPCO cited the **cost of compensation, decontamination and the decommissioning of reactors.**

Hirose said he hoped the incoming administration would look upon the request favorably.

"I want there to be down-to-earth discussions on energy policy from a broad perspective," Hirose said. "Excluding specific options is never the correct answer strategically."

Hirose also indicated he would continue to press for restarts of idle reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

"We will provide careful explanations, on the basis of lessons from the Fukushima disaster, so that people come to believe we can be safely entrusted with the operation of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant," he said.

"We know the Fukushima prefectural assembly adopted a petition to have all reactors in the prefecture decommissioned, but all we can say about the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant is: We haven't decided on anything yet."

(This article was written by Kentaro Uechi and Akira Minami.)

Hopeful signs in Onagawa?

December 21, 2012

Sun-dried fish in Onagawa sign of postquake recovery

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201212210044>

By KENGO HIYOSHI/ Staff Writer

ONAGAWA, Miyagi Prefecture--In this small port town in northeast Japan, a common sight in winter months is tens of thousands of fish drying on racks.

Exposed to cold air, Pacific sauries become more delicious, and during peak season in winter, as many as 30,000 sauries are dried each day.

That all changed after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.

The tsunami that struck Onagawa destroyed or damaged fish-processing plants and refrigeration facilities.

Recovery has been slow. But seafood products manufacturer Yamahon has made progress, and on Dec. 20, had 2,000 sauries hung out to dry for the first time since 3/11.

"We want to raise the number of sauries little by little," said Takeharu Yamamoto, a senior Yamahon official. "We are happy if our activity is of some help for the reconstruction of Onagawa."

The dried sauries will be shipped to all parts of Japan, and the drying operation will continue in Onagawa until March.

How much is an evacuee's life worth?

December 21, 2012

TEPCO settles over death of evacuee

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121220004397.htm>

FUKUSHIMA (Jiji Press)--Tokyo Electric Power Co. has reached a settlement with the family of a woman from Minamisoma who died as a result of the accident at the utility's crippled nuclear power plant, it was learned Thursday.

This is the first time that TEPCO has admitted a causal link between the death of an evacuee and the accident at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. A total of 183 cases of settlement have been made public by the government-run nuclear accident dispute settlement center.

According to the center, the woman, who was hospitalized in the Odaka district of the city, died in April last year after she was forced to evacuate after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis.

Through mediation by the center, TEPCO agreed to pay a total of 14.65 million yen to the family, including 12 million yen for her death.

Inactivity tells on health of Fukushima children

December 26, 2012

Stuck indoors, Fukushima children have highest obesity rates

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212260025>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Children in Fukushima Prefecture have the highest obesity rates in Japan in seven age groups, education ministry statistics showed, a possible result of the restrictions on outdoor activities due to lingering fears of radiation.

The ministry's preliminary statistics released Dec. 25 were based on 4.9 percent of all reports of health checkups in schools across Japan between April and June 2012.

Obese children, who are defined as those weighing at least 20 percent more than the standard weights defined by age and height, accounted for 2.39 percent of all 5-year-olds in Japan. But they accounted for 4.86 percent of 5-year-olds in Fukushima Prefecture, the highest rate in Japan.

The prefecture also had the highest obesity rates for children aged 6, 7, 8, 9, 14 and 17.

Officials at the Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education noted that schoolchildren's outdoor activities have been restricted since the tsunami on March 11, 2011, crippled the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"Children cannot play outdoors (even apart from gym classes), so they now engage in less physical exercise," an education board official said. "That may be one cause."

Education ministry officials said the Tohoku region has long been characterized by higher obesity rates. After comparable data became available in fiscal 2006, Fukushima Prefecture had the highest obesity rates for 16-year-olds in fiscal 2006, 5-year-olds in fiscal 2008, 9-year-olds in fiscal 2009, and 15-year-olds in fiscal 2010.

But never before had Fukushima Prefecture topped so many age groups.

In June 2011, three months after the start of the nuclear crisis, 71 of all 481 public elementary schools in Fukushima Prefecture refrained from holding gym classes and other activities outdoors, while 242 others restricted overall outdoor activity to one to four hours a day.

In May 2012, 21 percent of all schools, or 98, were still imposing partial restrictions on outdoor activity.

Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures were not included in the annual statistics for fiscal 2011, because the three prefectures in the Tohoku region were struggling to rebuild from the devastation of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Indoor playgrounds built in Fukushima, but children getting fat due to lack of exercise

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121226p2a00m0na017000c.html>

KORIYAMA, Fukushima -- While dozens of indoor playgrounds for children have been built in Fukushima Prefecture following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, an increasing number of children are getting fat mainly because of a lack of exercise over fears of radiation exposure, according to a survey released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology on Dec. 25.

Indoor playgrounds have so far been built at 37 locations in 18 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture in an effort to protect children from radiation released from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. PEP Kids Koriyama, built in Koriyama a year ago, is one of the major indoor playgrounds in the prefecture. The playground is always filled with children. A total of 350,000 people have visited the facility, which is equipped with one of the biggest sandboxes in the prefecture as well as trampolines, bicycles and other equipment.

However, pediatrician Shintaro Kikuchi, the 42-year-old founder and head of PEP Kids Koriyama, said the opportunities for children to use indoor playgrounds are limited because of the need to travel to visit them and restrictions on time.

"The environment for children to do exercise is a far cry from what it was before the nuclear accident, in which children could freely play outdoors," he said.

Watching her 8-year-old son splashing about, Mie Sawamura, a 31-year-old mother of two children in Koriyama, commented, "He was skinny before the earthquake disaster, maybe because he played around outside all day long. But he was found to be slightly obese in a medical checkup at school."

Sawamura's son has gained about 7 to 8 kilograms over the past year and a half. She said she wants her son to fulfill his dream of joining a soccer club, but she has yet to decide what to do because of her concerns about radiation.

The Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education commented that the survey results reflected "stress caused by restrictions imposed on outdoor activities last fiscal year and changes in living environments in the process of evacuation." The education board believes that the opportunities for children to do exercise outside schools have also been on the decline. Following decontamination work at school playgrounds this year, 90 percent of all elementary schools, or 429 elementary schools in the prefecture, resumed their normal outdoor activities. But 55 other elementary schools, or 11 percent of all elementary schools, remain partially restricted.

"It's clear that the longer children stay indoors, the less exercise they do and the more food they eat between meals," Kikuchi said. "Dietary education is also necessary."

Shinzo Kimura, associate professor at Dokkyo Medical University, said, "Exercise is important for children's growth and concentration on learning. Because outdoor activities (in areas affected by the nuclear disaster) increase radiation exposure, it is necessary for children to fix a time and do exercise intensively in that time."

Inactivity amid nuclear crisis leaving Fukushima children out of shape

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121226a5.html>

Kyodo

Children in nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture are getting fatter due to lack of outdoor exercise amid daily radiation exposure limitations, the government said Tuesday in its school health report.

The preliminary report, released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, showed an increase in children from kindergarten to high school age who weighed 20 percent more than the standard according to their height.

In Fukushima, 449 schools, or 56 percent of public schools, had curtailed outdoor activities during school time as of June last year to minimize exposure to radiation released from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 atomic plant. Such restrictions were still in place at 71 elementary and junior high schools this September, according to the prefectural board of education. It is believed schools based the amount of time they allowed kids to spend outdoors on local atmospheric radioactive fallout readings.

The obesity trend was noticeable among early elementary school students, with the rate among first-graders standing at 9.7 percent, up 4.7 percentage points from the previous survey in fiscal 2010 through March 2011, which was when the fallout crisis started. The rate for third-graders came to 13.5 percent, up 5.1 points.

As for ninth-graders, the rate was 11.5 percent, up 0.6 point, while that for high school seniors stood at 14.1 percent, up 1.4 points, according to the latest survey, which is based on health checkups conducted between April and June.

The board of education received reports on the increase in overweight students even though schools have adopted various measures to complement the lack of outdoor exercise, including pushing kids to use stairways and halls to increase walking, an official said.

Children in northern regions that experience more severe winters are prone to gain weight because they are inclined to curb outdoor activities when it's cold. But a ministry official noted the obesity trend seen in children in Fukushima should not be attributed only to the usual cold winters, and the report meanwhile did not indicate if its findings were linked to seasonal factors.

Given the problematic trend, the board of education may dispatch sports trainers to schools and encourage students to engage in community sports activities, an official said.

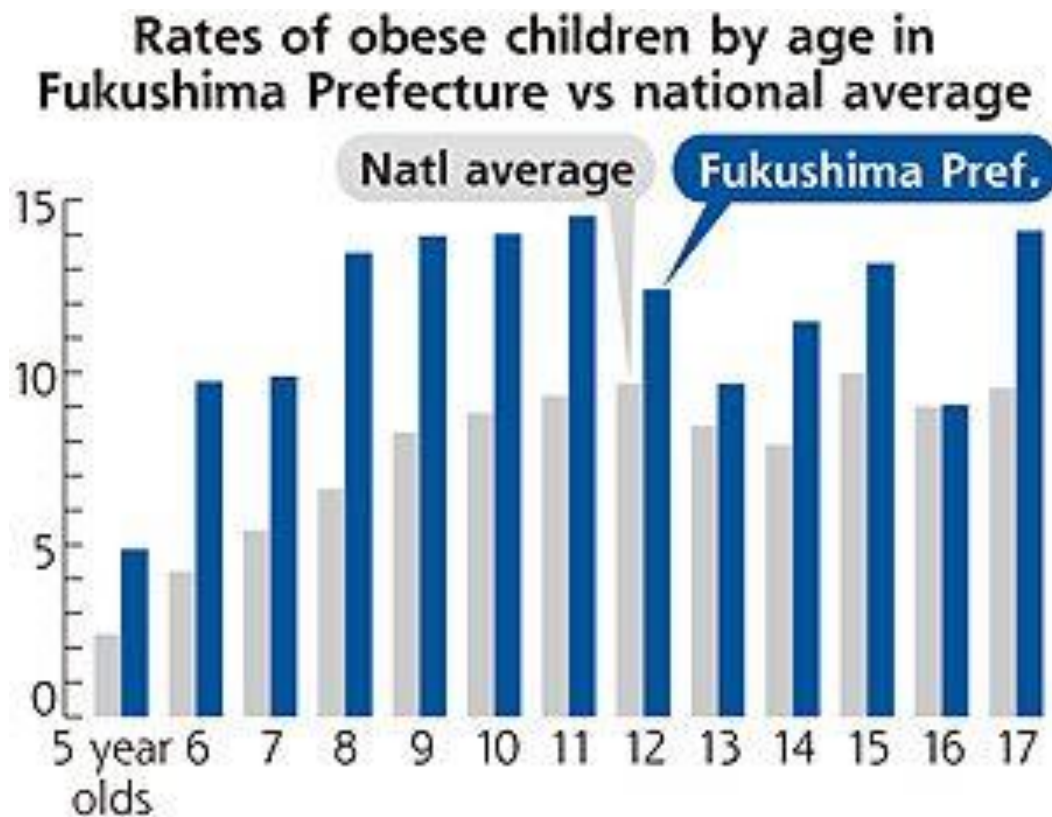
Alarming trend towards obesity (follow-up)

December 27, 2012

Obesity rising for Fukushima kids / 5- to 9-year-olds show highest rates of obese children across the nation

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121226001794.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun



An alarming trend toward obesity has been found among children in Fukushima Prefecture, which has the highest rate of obese children in every age group between 5 and 9 years old, according to the results of a nationwide school health survey released by the education ministry.

The Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry also said the prefecture ranked second-worst for the rate of obese children aged 10 and 11.

An official of the Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education attributed the trend to "a lack of physical exercise and stress stemming from prolonged living in shelters and restrictions on playing outside" after the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011.

The survey comprised a random nationwide sample of 695,600 children in kindergarten, primary, middle and high schools, aged from five to 17, from April to June. The sample represents about 5 percent of all children in the country in this age group.

The survey reflects the number of children with an obesity rate, which is calculated based on average weights and other factors, of 20 percent or more.

It was not conducted last year in Fukushima Prefecture due to the disaster.

In comparison with figures from the 2010 academic year, the prefecture's rate of 6-year-old obese boys increased to 11.4 percent, the highest observed, from 6.2 percent, or ninth place just two years ago.

The age group containing 8-year-old girls in the prefecture also showed the highest obesity rates, standing at 14.61 percent--nearly double the 8.1 percent recorded in 2010, or 17th in the rankings.

Children in the 10- and 11-year-old age groups in Miyagi Prefecture and those in the 16-year-old age group in Iwate Prefecture also had the highest obesity level in the rankings. However, the increase in obese children in Fukushima Prefecture was the most extreme among the three prefectures, which were hit hardest by the quake and tsunami.

Many children from Fukushima Prefecture still live in shelters away from their homes. Furthermore, about half of public primary schools had restricted their students' outdoor activities, such as to three hours in a day as of October 2011, out of consideration for possible radiation on school grounds.

Regarding the spike in obesity in the 5- to 9-year-old group, an official of the education board said: "Parents, particularly those who have small children, were very concerned about possible radiation effects. They may have also restricted their children from playing outside at home."
(Dec. 27, 2012)

N-fears suspected in weight gain

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121226001753.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Childhood obesity rates, by percentage, in Fukushima Pref. vs national average

		Fukushima Pref. FY10 → FY12		National average FY10 → FY12	
6 year olds	Boys	6.18 (9th)	11.42 (1st)	4.46	4.09
	Girls	3.83 (32nd)	7.91 (3rd)	4.23	4.37
8 year olds	Boys	8.57 (16th)	12.37 (2nd)	7.2	7.13
	Girls	8.11 (17th)	14.61 (1st)	6.9	6.09
10 year olds	Boys	11.81 (15th)	16.91 (1st)	10.37	9.86
	Girls	10.28 (9th)	10.98 (7th)	8.13	7.73

FUKUSHIMA--The Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education is drawing up plans to help schools prevent childhood obesity, after the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry's announcement Tuesday that obesity has been on the rise among children in the prefecture.

The increased rate of childhood obesity in the prefecture since the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has led some observers to speculate radiation fears caused the increase.

The education board plans to promote exercise by sending sports experts to primary schools, a board official said.

One ministry official commented: "As snow piles up in the Tohoku region during the winter, children there tend not to get enough exercise."

Indeed, the highest obesity rates in recent years have been recorded in the six prefectures in the Tohoku region and Hokkaido.

An official of the Fukushima board's health education division said, "We have no choice but to conclude such high rates are a result of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake."

In each age group from 5 to 9 years old, the prefecture's obesity was the highest in the country. "As parents with small children have especially strong fears of radiation, the rates among children in kindergarten and the lower grades of primary schools were markedly high."

Although decontamination efforts of school grounds have been progressing since the survey was conducted in spring, primary schools in the prefecture were previously asked to limit children's outdoor activities to three hours a day in October 2011.

The restriction was lifted in 90 percent of schools by September.

Kanebusa Primary School in Minami-Soma in the prefecture, which resumed classes at a temporary school building in the city, lifted the restriction this spring. Principal Shoichi Yamanobe said, "We were concerned the children might lose their stamina, agility and sense of balance [because they couldn't spend much time outside]." But now, he says, children are free to play outdoors and have been steadily regaining their strength.

Takashi Goto, head of the Japan Child and Family Research Institute, said: "Building physical strength is important not only in childhood but also over a lifetime. Schools should strive to promote children's healthy growth by providing them with increased chances for exercise while playing."

But what is "accurate information" on Fukushima fish?

December 26, 2012

EDITORIAL

The facts on Fukushima's fish

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20121226a2.html>

The catastrophe at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant not only affected people directly in Fukushima Prefecture but also harmed the local economy. Sales of products from the prefecture have suffered, and tourist spots have lost business, because of rumors or misinformation about radioactive contamination.

To help increase consumers' understanding of the local situation, Iwaki City on Nov. 16 started providing radiation measurement data on its agricultural and fishery products at its website : misemasu-iwaki.jp As its name "*Misemasu Iwaki*" (We will show Iwaki to you) implies, this is an attempt to offer accurate data promptly on the radiation levels of the city's products to consumers. It is hoped that consumers as well as retail companies will appreciate the city's efforts and help it.

The sea off Fukushima Prefecture used to be a rich fishing ground, because warm and cold ocean currents converge there. But after the nuclear crisis in March 2011, fishing in the southern sea area ground to a halt.

There is now commercial fishing on a trial basis in part of the northern sea area. Just a few kinds of fish, such as bonito and Pacific saury, which are caught by Iwaki fishermen far away from Fukushima's coast, are unloaded at local ports like Onahama. But it's a sad story. If such fish are unloaded at ports outside Fukushima Prefecture, nobody thinks twice about buying them. But if they are unloaded at ports in the prefecture and then shipped to other places for sale, they attract suspicion because they are from Fukushima Prefecture.

In May, Fukushima fisherman caught 18 tons of bonito off Hachijo Island off Tokyo and brought them to their home port, where radiation measurements confirmed that they were safe. But when the fish were shipped to Tokyo's Tsukiji wholesale market, the market did not even put them up for bidding.

People should understand that fishermen from Iwaki unload fish at local ports in Fukushima Prefecture in order to protect the livelihoods of local people who process fish. Only when fish are unloaded and processed at local ports is a true revival of the local fishing industry possible.

Local fishermen want to stop relying on compensation money from Tepco. They say that they only reaffirm their identify as fishermen by catching fish. These fishermen deserve support from consumers outside Fukushima Prefecture.

To help Iwaki's fishing industry, the AEON retailing group in June started selling bonito unloaded at Onahama port after their radiation levels are measured. AEON shows the area where the fish were caught and makes it clear that they have been shipped from Onahama. AEON says the response from consumers in the Tokyo region has been good.

Consumers should not be influenced by rumors. They should try to get accurate information and make their own judgments. Iwaki City's efforts to help consumers obtain accurate information deserve to be commended and should serve as an example for other Fukushima towns and cities to follow.

Fukushima residents' declaration of human rights

December 28, 2012

Fukushima victims take a stand with human rights declaration

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212280021>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--In a symbolic gesture, residents of Fukushima Prefecture have sought to address their grievances stemming from the nuclear disaster here last year with a basic declaration of human rights.

It was drafted by Yoshitaro Nomura, a Tokyo-based lawyer who has been providing legal consultations for those affected by the reactor meltdowns that caused mass evacuations. He has also been giving advice to victims and taking part in negotiations for compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Nomura, 53, wrote the draft of the Fukushima human rights declaration this spring after listening to the views of Fukushima residents.

Among other things, it says the March 2011 disaster deprived residents of the right to pursue happiness as stipulated in the Japanese Constitution.

More than 150 people responded to an appeal circulated at meetings and on the Internet to support the declaration. Nomura's goal is to collect 100,000 signatures.

Although the declaration is nonbinding, Nomura said he will ask the national and local governments to heed the concerns of local residents.

A symposium was held in Fukushima on Nov. 11 to generate momentum for the declaration. It was attended by scholars as well as ordinary citizens whose lives were uprooted by the disaster.

Nomura refers to the parties directly involved, and in his view responsible for the disaster, as "perpetrators."

"Those who caused the accident switched from having responsibility to escaping from responsibility," he said. "In essence, they are trivializing the disaster, cutting the amount of compensation and announcing the crisis is over."

Nomura said the parallels between the Fukushima case and that of Minamata disease, a neurological disorder caused by mercury poisoning in seafood, were inescapable.

"What did the administration do in the wake of Fukushima crisis?" Nomura asked. "The government delayed giving evacuation orders. Now it is giving priority to economic recovery over the health of residents."

Participants in the Nov. 11 symposium commented on the declaration.

"We want Fukushima to return to the way it was, where we can eat tasty rice, vegetables, fruit, fish and meat without the slightest fear," says one passage in the declaration.

Tomoo Onuki, 63, and his wife Setsuko, 56, said they were impressed by the passage in light of the fact their vegetable garden stopped producing following decontamination work.

Only a single basil tree now survives in the sandy soil. The couple's efforts over 20 years to nurture the soil have come to naught.

"I had thought that decontamination would make me feel refreshed," Setsuko said. "But I was wrong. I feel as if I had my skin removed."

Airborne radiation 1 centimeter above the soil in their garden has dropped to 0.4 microsievert per hour compared with 2-3 microsieverts per hour prior to decontamination.

The Onukis continue to drink filtered water. They buy their vegetables from a farmer in Yamanashi Prefecture and rice from a farmer in Akita Prefecture.

Still, they do not feel safe. They are particularly concerned about the health of their 20-year-old daughter, who lives with them, Setsuko said.

Fumiko Hirai, a 63-year-old resident of Fukushima's Kitasawamata district, shared the message in this passage: "We have the right to receive information on the damage caused by radiation until we are fully satisfied. We have the right to know."

Using 500,000 yen (\$6,100) provided by city authorities for decontamination work, Hirai got rid of weeds in her garden. She also had a ditch decontaminated.

Given that she intends to continue living in this city, Hirai has plenty of questions about the future of nuclear power generation in Japan as well as the current state of the Chernobyl plant, site of a catastrophic nuclear accident in 1986, in Ukraine.

Despite her concerns, Hirai said that many people prefer not to think about the past, perhaps out of a fear of rocking the boat.

"They opt to close the lid on the right to know, and this goes to the heart of freedom of expression," she said. "I want to nudge them to speak up."

Yasuhiro Abe, a movie theater manager, cited a passage that says, "We have the right to self-determination about whether to evacuate or not."

Abe, 49, his wife, 44, and their eldest daughter, 11, fled Fukushima Prefecture shortly after the crisis flared.

Abe returned alone to open the theater three weeks later.

He said he wants to continue to work in Fukushima, but the prospects are dim.

He visits Kyoto, where his wife and daughter live, once a month. The overnight bus costs 20,000 yen for a round trip. He also sends them 150,000 yen each month.

Abe said a gulf has been developing among people whose lives have been transformed by the nuclear disaster.

He said they hurt each other unintentionally with comments like, "It's nice to have a place to evacuate to" and "People with children get more in the way of consolation payments."

(This is article was written by Masakazu Honda and Etsuko Akuzawa.)

Environment Minister in Fukushima

December 27, 2012

New Environment Minister meets Fukushima Gov.

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121227_32.html

Japan's new Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara says he will work with Fukushima to decontaminate the prefecture following last year's nuclear disaster.

Ishihara met prefectural governor Yuhei Sato in Fukushima City on Thursday. Much of the prefecture was contaminated by radioactivity from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Ishihara said that he wants to discuss candidly with prefectural officials building a storage facility for radioactive waste and other issues.

Sato thanked Ishihara for visiting the prefecture immediately after taking his Cabinet post.

The governor said he wants the central government to understand the feelings of residents and the problems facing local communities.

Ishihara later told reporters he could not say yet when the government will begin to study a possible storage site.

He said the government should first obtain the understanding and trust of local people.

Dec. 27, 2012 - Updated 11:23 UTC (20:23 JST)

Abe visits Fukushima Daiichi

December 29, 2012

New Japan PM visits tsunami-wrecked nuclear plant

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FUKUSHIMA DAI-ICHI NUCLEAR POWER PLANT--Newly installed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the tsunami-devastated Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear plant on Dec. 29 as his government reconsiders plans to eventually phase out the use of atomic energy.

Donning protective gear, Abe took a bus tour of the plant--site of the worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster--and greeted workers at its emergency operations center, in Okuma town on Japan's northeastern coast.

A massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, swamped parts of the Fukushima plant, disabling backup systems and triggering radiation-spewing meltdowns that forced tens of thousands of people to flee. The disaster triggered massive protests against atomic energy and widespread public distrust in nuclear plant operators and regulators.

Japan's nuclear reactors were suspended for checks after the Fukushima meltdowns, and only two of the country's 50 reactors are currently online.

During his visit to the Fukushima plant's operations center, Abe urged employees of the plant's embattled owner, Tokyo Electric Power Co., to persevere as the company works to clean up radiation released by the accident and safely close the plant permanently.

The previous government, led by the rival Democratic Party of Japan, had pledged to phase out nuclear power by 2040 by retiring aging reactors and not replacing them.

But Abe's Liberal Democratic Party, which regained power in elections this month, says it plans to spend 10 years studying the best energy mix for the country. Abe also has said he may reconsider the previous government's decision to stop building reactors.

The relatively favorable stance toward resuming operations of more nuclear plants has won favor among business leaders worried about power shortages and rising costs; since the Fukushima disaster, Japanese imports of costly liquefied natural gas have soared.

It's unclear, however, if that would win the approval of the government's Nuclear Regulation Authority, which is drawing up new, compulsory safety standards and checking some plants for potential trouble from geologic faults that could compromise safety in case of earthquakes, which are common in this seismically active country.

Decommissioning effort called 'service to nation'

Abe visits Fukushima plant, thanks workers

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121229x1.html>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe inspected the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant Saturday to show the public that his administration is serious about speeding up decontamination and reconstruction work while it tackles a host of other pressing issues, his aides said.

Donning a hazmat suit at J Village, a soccer center converted into a base for those involved in stabilizing the plant's crippled reactors, Abe met with workers to thank them for their service to the nation.

It was his first visit to the Fukushima No. 1 power station as prime minister. The complex suffered three catastrophic core meltdown in March 2011 after the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing 15-meter tsunami knocked out the power supply.

"I know the decommissioning process is hard work. But it is progressing well and we owe it all to you," Abe told the workers.

The prime minister then visited the No. 1 plant and spoke with employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co. who are engaged in preparatory work for the removal of spent nuclear fuel from the wrecked reactors' storage pools.

Abe was slated to visit temporary accommodations in the prefecture later in the day and meet with residents who were evacuated due to the nuclear crisis last year. He was expected to return to Tokyo on Saturday evening.

Accompanying Abe on the trip was Takumi Nemoto, a Diet member representing a constituency in Fukushima who was appointed reconstruction minister in the new Cabinet inaugurated Wednesday.

Abe also inspected the power plant in October as leader of the Liberal Democratic Party.

Tomioka chief rips restarts

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA — The mayor of a town rendered off-limits by the Fukushima disaster told environment officials Friday that he is opposed to restarting more of the nation's idled nuclear reactors.

"The government's apparent stance of giving priority to restarts hurts the feelings of the people in Fukushima Prefecture," Tomioka Mayor Katsuya Endo told two senior vice environment ministers from the new government led by the Liberal Democratic Party. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched his Cabinet on Wednesday.

"Fukushima is absolutely opposed to the government's plan to restart nuclear plants without consensus based on people's discussions," Endo told Shinji Inoue and Kazunori Tanaka.

He also criticized past LDP administrations for the slack safety standards they imposed on nuclear power plants in the first place. Unless Abe's new government reflects on the past, it will not be able to win the public's trust, Endo said.

The LDP returned to power earlier this month after three years in the opposition camp. Trade minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Abe's team will review the national strategy set out by the Democratic Party of Japan-led administration to aim for a reactor phaseout by 2040.

The meeting took place in Koriyama, where the administrative functions of Endo's town were transferred to escape the fallout from the core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 complex.

Tomiooka and adjacent Naraha host the Fukushima No. 2 plant, another nuclear complex that was taken offline along with most of the nation's other reactors after the meltdowns. Fukushima No. 2 is 12 km south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 facility.

Evacuees get home visits

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA — Some of the people who fled the radioactive fallout in Fukushima Prefecture will get to spend their first New Year holidays at home since the nuclear catastrophe, the government said Friday. Starting Saturday, four municipalities with radiation restrictions will allow residents to stay in their homes up to five nights.

A total of 525 residents — 221 from Minamisoma, 236 from Iitate, 16 from Kawauchi and 52 from Tamura — have preregistered for the stays, the government said.

Abe inspects crisis-hit Fukushima nuke plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121229p2g00m0fp029000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday inspected the Fukushima Daiichi plant in northeastern Japan, where the country's worst nuclear crisis has unfolded.

His trip to the plant in Fukushima Prefecture immediately after he launched his Cabinet Wednesday is aimed at demonstrating his government is serious about speeding up postdisaster reconstruction efforts while tackling other key issues such as reviving the country's stagnant economy, his aides said earlier.

Changing into a radiation protection suit at "J Village," a former soccer training center now used by people responsible for containing the crisis at the plant, Abe met with plant workers there to thank them for their service.

"I know decommissioning work (for reactors at the plant) is hard work. But it is progressing well and we owe it all to you," Abe told the workers.

Abe will go into one of the reactor buildings at the plant and meet with employees of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., also known as TEPCO, who are doing preparatory work for the removal of spent nuclear fuel from a pool at the reactor.

Abe will also visit temporary shelters in the prefecture accommodating people who were evacuated after the nuclear accident at the plant, which was crippled by the massive March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in the northeast.

Accompanying Abe is Takumi Nemoto, who represents a constituency in the prefecture and was appointed reconstruction minister by Abe on Wednesday.

Abe has also inspected the plant in October, as head of the Liberal Democratic Party.

Move to Okinawa?

December 31, 2012

Radiation-averse evacuees flock to Okinawa

Island's tropical lifestyle, housing subsidies, lack of reactors soothe fears

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121231a6.html>

By YURI KAGEYAMA

AP

NAHA, Okinawa Pref. — Okinawa is about as far away as one can get from Fukushima Prefecture without leaving Japan, and that is why Minaho Kubota is there.

Petrified of the radiation still being released from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that was crippled by multiple meltdowns last year, Kubota grabbed her children, left her skeptical husband and moved to the island. Besides her, more than 1,000 people from the disaster zone have done the same thing.

"I thought I would lose my mind," Kubota said during a recent interview. "I felt I would have no answer for my children if, after they grew up, they ever asked me, 'Mama, why didn't you leave?'"

Experts and the government say there have been no visible health effects yet from the radioactive contamination spewed forth by Fukushima No. 1 so far. But they also warn that even low-dose radiation carries some risk of cancer and other diseases, and that exposure should be avoided as much as possible,

especially by consuming contaminated food and water. Such risks are several times higher for children and even higher for fetuses, and may not appear for years.

Okinawa, which is devoid of nuclear power plants, has welcomed evacuees from Fukushima and the other northeastern prefectures affected by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that set off the nuclear disaster. The prefecture is offering ¥60,000 a month to help relocating families of three or four pay the rent, and lower amounts for smaller families.

"We hope they feel better, maybe refreshed," said Okinawan official Masakazu Gunji.

Other prefectures have offered similar aid, but Okinawa's help is relatively generous. In fact, anyone who applied by Friday was given an extra year of aid.

Most people displaced by the disaster have relocated within or near Fukushima, but tropical Okinawa is the most popular area for those who have chosen to move far away from the nuclear disaster. An escape to Okinawa underlines a determination to get away from radiation and, for some, distrust of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility that maintained the poorly protected Fukushima plant.

Kazue Sato lived in fear of radiation because the roof of her Fukushima home in Iwaki was destroyed by the earthquake.

And so, together with her husband, a chef, she moved back to Okinawa, where she grew up. She now lives in her grandparents' home and hopes she and her husband can turn it into a coffee shop.

But Sato is still struggling with depression, especially because her old friends criticized her for what they thought were exaggerated fears of radiation. She struggles with a sense of guilt about having abandoned Fukushima.

"Little children have to wear masks. People can't hang their laundry outdoors," she said. "Some people can't get away even if they want to. I feel so sorry for them."

Sato and Kubota are joining a class-action lawsuit being prepared against the government and Tepco on behalf of Fukushima-area residents affected by the meltdowns. It demands an apology payment of ¥50,000 a month for each victim until all the radiation from the accident is wiped out, a process that could take decades, if ever, for some areas.

Independent investigations into the nuclear disaster have concluded that Fukushima No. 1 was unprepared for the massive tsunami, in part because of the nuclear industry's cozy relationship with government regulators reduced safety.

"We think people have the right to live in an environment not polluted by radiation that may harm their health, and that right has been violated by this accident," Izutaro Managi, one of the case's lawyers, said in a meeting earlier this month for plaintiffs in Naha, Okinawa's capital.

The statute of limitations requires that the lawsuit be filed no later than March 11, 2014. About 20 of the evacuees in Okinawa have joined the lawsuit, which has gathered 100 other people in the three weeks since it began.

Kubota, who now works part time for an Okinawa magazine publisher, said the problem is that no one is taking responsibility for the accident.

"Seeking accountability through a lawsuit may feel like such a roundabout effort. But in the end, it's going to be the best shortcut," she said.

She is getting health checkups for her children, fretting over any discovered problems, including anemia, fevers and nosebleeds.

Her fears are heightened by the fact that she and her children had to live in their car right after the disaster, which liquefied the land and destroyed their home. They had unknowingly played outdoors while the nuclear plants were exploding, she recalled.

The disaster ended up separating her family. Her husband refused to leave his dental practice in neighboring Ibaraki Prefecture. They argued over whether to relocate, but she knew she had to leave on her own when he said, "There is nothing we can do."

These days, he visits her and their two boys, aged 8 and 12, in her new apartment in Okinawa on weekends. He sends her money, something he did not do at first.

"I wake up every day and feel thankful my children are alive. I have been through so much. I have been heartbroken. I have been so afraid," she said.

Iodine pill distribution - Not so obvious

January 1, 2013

Iodine pill distribution may be delayed

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121231002863.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Distribution of iodine pills to residents near nuclear power plants for use in the event of a nuclear accident, a preventative measure advised by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, could be significantly delayed as additional legal procedures on the drug have now been deemed necessary, according to sources.

It is believed that if the pills were taken before radiation exposure, the iodine could be retained in the thyroid gland to prevent radioactive iodine from accumulating.

The potassium iodide contained in iodine tablets is approved by the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law as a pharmaceutical product effective in curbing excessive secretion of thyroidal hormones and inducing secretion of bronchial mucosa, according to the NRA and other sources.

The drug is widely used in the treatment of thyroid diseases, chronic bronchitis and others.

But the product has yet to be approved as a drug for protection from radiation exposure.

The NRA intends to obtain approval for this category, but local governments around nuclear plants will be unable to specifically include preventive distribution of the drug in their regional disaster management plans to be devised by March. This may affect the restart of idled nuclear reactors as well, according to the sources.

Protective effects of the potassium iodide already have been internationally recognized as seen in their use after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in the former Soviet Union.

In Japan, however, the drug had rarely been used before the outbreak of the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and no pharmaceutical company has filed for approval of the drug for that purpose.

As a result, its legal standing has remained unclear while some local governments have proceeded to stockpile the drug.

The NRA has been considering providing the drug in advance to residents within a five-kilometer radius of a nuclear plant, though the targeted area could be expanded.

But distributing the unauthorized drug could also trigger opposition from local doctors and others.

As long as the drug remains unapproved, victims would not be entitled to receive compensation from the state under a relief system if it were found to have side effects.

The pills are believed to curb cases of thyroid cancer, but could cause such side effects as iodine allergy or hypothyroidism.

NRA officials plan to obtain additional legal approval after holding consultations with Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry officials, the sources said.

But when a drug is approved for additional effectiveness, it often takes more than a year as a pharmaceutical company needs to file at the health ministry after gathering relevant data to prove such effectiveness and obtain approval at a ministry council.

A senior ministry official said, "It is possible [for the NRA] to ask a pharmaceutical company to file [for approval], but it will be difficult to give approval as it is necessary to obtain such data as the dosage taken by workers at the Fukushima plant."

A senior official at the NRA said the nuclear authority wants to hold consultations with the ministry as soon as possible.

Fukushima recovery headquarters

January 1, 2013

TEPCO sets up 'Fukushima recovery headquarters' near disaster-hit plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130101p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) on Jan. 1 set up a "Fukushima recovery headquarters" near its disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, but **doubts remain about the new facility's effectiveness as utility continues to struggle financially.**

The headquarters were set up at the "J-Village" facility serving as the base of operations to bring the Fukushima plant disaster under control. TEPCO also plans to move ahead with the establishment of a research facility acting as an international base for reactor dismantlement, and to set up a next-generation coal-fired thermal power plant in the prefecture. The efforts are to "fulfill (TEPCO's) responsibility" for the disaster, according to company president Naomi Hirose.

The recovery headquarters' establishment came after Hirose told a news conference on Nov. 7, 2012, 100 days after the company was effectively nationalized, "Our response to the disaster will serve as the origin of the reborn TEPCO. We will not run from Fukushima."

The new headquarters will handle decisions on compensation payments and radiation decontamination, taking over the job from TEPCO's main headquarters. In line with the move, TEPCO will boost its Fukushima Prefecture workforce to around 4,000 workers by the end of 2013 -- an increase of about 500 workers. It will speed up compensation payments and decontamination work, which have come under fire for taking too long. Employees not stationed at the Fukushima headquarters will visit the prefecture two to three times a year to help residents with everyday tasks such as transporting home furniture in a move Hirose dubbed "working together with Fukushima."

Fukushima Prefecture has suffered a population decline and loss of jobs because of the nuclear disaster. TEPCO predicts the planned coal plant will create 2,000 jobs in its construction, 200 in its operation, and 1,000 for regular inspections every few years. It accordingly views the plant as playing a major role in employment recovery and rebuilding people's livelihoods.

A portion of other administrative jobs performed in the Kanto region -- including payroll calculations and call center operations -- will also gradually be transferred to Fukushima Prefecture. TEPCO hopes to have its reactor dismantling research facility up and running in the spring of 2013.

"If there are more employees living in Fukushima Prefecture, it will bring vitality to local shops and help recovery," says Hirose.

However, there are many outstanding issues. Because TEPCO suffered financially from the nuclear disaster and has effectively been nationalized, it is unable to build large-scale power plants on its own and is duty-bound to buy its power from other companies through bidding. Under the current framework it would be difficult for the company to construct a coal power plant in Fukushima Prefecture by itself.

President Hirose is calling on the national government to give the utility "special help for aiding the recovery" of the prefecture.

Furthermore, assistance from the government and the International Atomic Energy Agency will be needed when setting up the reactor disassembly research facility.

"TEPCO cannot handle the job itself," one official at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry commented.

Some are hopeful about TEPCO's plans.

"If they create employment it will be a first step towards residents' return," commented an employee of the Tomioka town government. Others, however, still have strong suspicions, such as an anti-nuclear plant demonstrator in Tokyo who dismissed the efforts as "a performance intended to initiate the reactivation of nuclear plants."

TEPCO vice-president Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, who is living in Fukushima Prefecture and who has become representative for the recovery headquarters, said, "While doing our work, we will think of what we can do for recovery and execute it. We would like to be evaluated on that work as we do it."

Nuclear benefits = bribery?

January 2, 2013

More residents refuse nuclear benefits after Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301020092>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The number of households declining benefits for living near nuclear plants has nearly doubled since the Fukushima disaster, **reflecting growing opposition to a system long criticized as paying off citizens to promote nuclear power.**

In fiscal 2011, 14 prefectures paid 7.6 billion yen (\$87 million) in benefits to 1.03 million households, according to figures obtained by The Asahi Shimbun through interviews and freedom-of-information requests.

In that year, 171 households declined the benefits, an increase of 80 percent from 94 the previous year. The number ranged between 80 and 100 in preceding years.

The figures exclude Fukui Prefecture, which does not compile statistics on those people.

A 64-year-old resident of Hitachi, Ibaraki Prefecture, said the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused by the tsunami in March 2011 prompted him to refuse part of the benefits.

“I have received the benefits without thinking about it, but they are nothing but bribery,” he said. “We feel indebted if we continue to receive them even though they are a small amount.”

He said he did not refuse the full amount because he wants Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, which serves the prefecture, to continue sending him payment notices so that he can voice his opposition in response.

“I want to show every year that I do not want the money” by refusing part of the benefits, he said.

The increase in refusers was particularly noticeable in Fukushima, Aomori and Ibaraki prefectures.

In Fukushima Prefecture, 46 households declined the benefits, compared with 28 in fiscal 2010. Only four municipalities in the prefecture paid benefits because seven decided against it after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant.

Fifty households declined in Aomori Prefecture, up nearly 80 percent from 28, while 25 refused the payments in Ibaraki Prefecture, a more than sixfold increase from four.

The benefits, funded by taxes collected as part of electricity bills, are paid by utilities on behalf of municipal governments.

The amounts are based on the power generation capacity of nuclear power plants and other factors. The annual individual amounts in fiscal 2011 ranged from 2,172 yen to 36,000 yen.

A man who lives only 9 km from a nuclear power plant in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, declined the full amount of 4,368 yen for fiscal 2011.

“I do not want to receive money collected to promote nuclear power,” he said. “I wanted to directly inform TEPCO that I do not want nuclear power plants.”

The 65-year-old said he did not pay special attention to nuclear power until after the Fukushima disaster. “The last thing I want to do is to leave the world tainted with radioactivity to our children and grandchildren.”

Yasue Ashihara, who has opposed the planned expansion of the Shimane nuclear power plant, suspects utilities use the benefit system to keep tabs on nuclear opponents.

“Only people strongly opposed to nuclear power take the trouble of refusing the benefits,” Ashihara, 59, said. “I think the system has been used as a tool to learn about who they are.”

Ashihara said the benefits are not expected to silence potential nuclear opponents because the amounts are so small.

Residents continue to receive the benefits once they specify their bank accounts or other means for receiving them. To refuse them, residents need to submit a written form to utilities.

In 2002, reports surfaced that utilities had compiled a list of refusers and their beliefs, labeling some as nuclear opponents, and provided the information to local governments. Local governments said they have changed the procedures and are no longer aware of the reasons why households decline the benefits.

A member of an anti-nuclear group in Niigata Prefecture said the benefits are paid as compensation for inconveniencing residents living near nuclear power plants.

Several people seek her advice on the benefits every year, and she tells them that there is no problem receiving the payments.

“You do not have to support nuclear power if you receive the benefits,” she said.

The system was introduced in fiscal 1981 to seek understanding and cooperation for nuclear power. It is said to derive from Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka's suggestion in 1973 that electricity charges should be lowered in areas around nuclear power plants.

In a Diet session in 1982, a lawmaker said the benefits are nothing but favors doled out to residents and could jeopardize discussions on the safety of nuclear power plants.

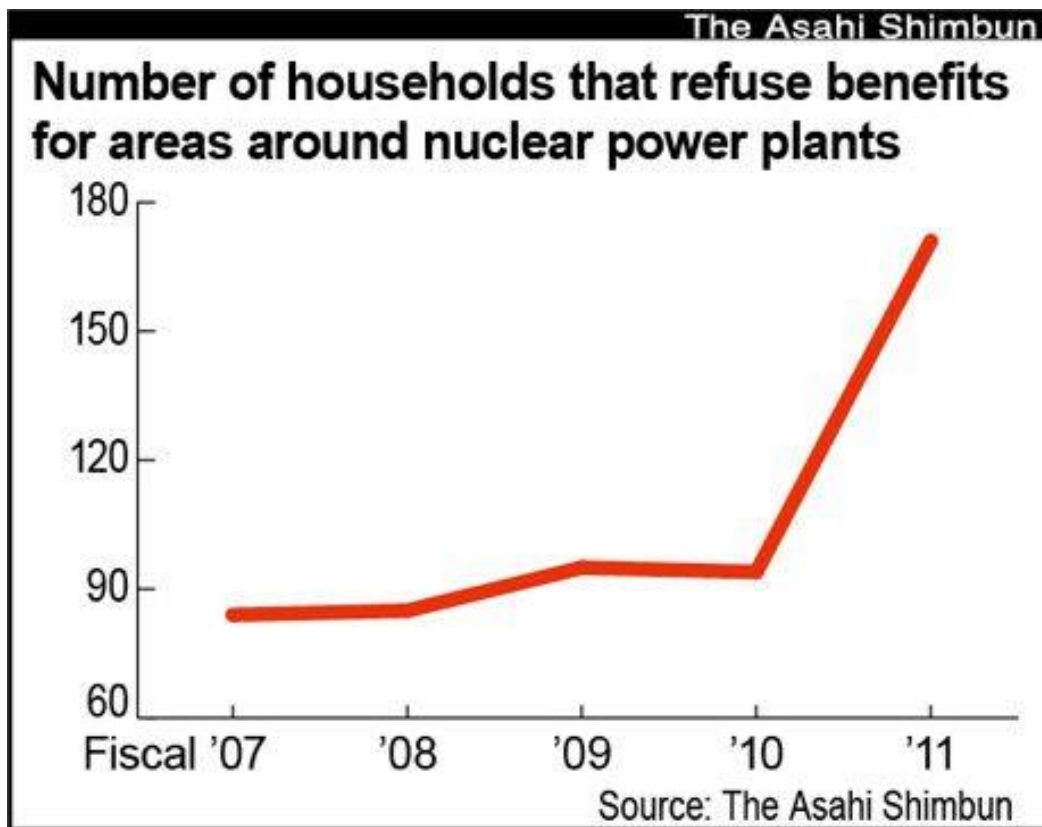
A senior official at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy told the Diet session that the government cannot promote construction of nuclear power plants unless residents receive some gains.

The agency official explained that the system was a temporary measure, although it has continued for more than 30 years.

Shuji Shimizu, a professor of regional finance at Fukushima University, said the benefits--cash directly given to individuals--are **a blatant example of dispensing favors.**

"I think a growing number of people in areas around nuclear power plants are saying 'no' to such a practice by rejecting the benefits," Shimizu said.

(This article was compiled from reports by Satoshi Otani, Takuho Shiraki and Atsushi Otaka.)



Sea "cleaners"

January 3, 2013

Divers, fishermen join hands to restore ocean off Iwate

January 03, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201301030006>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

OFUNATO, Iwate Prefecture--Even the chilly ocean couldn't keep divers out of the waters of the Sakihama fishing port here, who gathered around a firewood stove to warm themselves up after their "mission."

They are members of a volunteer group that has been removing debris lying on the ocean floor, cleaning up from the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

"I really thank them for cleaning the port," said a 67-year-old fisherman, showing his appreciation for the group, the Sanriku Volunteer Divers. "The divers are not just friends. They are something much more than that."

This volunteer effort was started in April 2011 immediately following the Great East Japan Earthquake by 38-year-old group leader Hiroshi Sato.

Sato was visiting a distant relative, Koichi Watari, 59, at another fishing port to deliver supplies.

"The sea and rivers are crammed with debris," Watari, a fisherman, told him. "Do you think salmon will make their runs upstream amid these conditions?"

Sato, a diving instructor, was conducting Salmon Swim, a tour to observe salmon swimming upstream to spawn. Watari's question made Sato think that he, as a diver, should help restore the undersea environment that existed before the earthquake.

Sato did not know what kind of impact he could make, but he decided he had no choice but to try.

At first, the fishery cooperative expressed reluctance at allowing Sato to dive in fishing ports. Fishermen associated divers with poaching, and there was prejudice against them.

Watari persuaded his colleagues, saying "they will not be a nuisance to the fishery cooperative." So, one month after the quake and tsunami, two divers and several fishermen started struggling with cleaning up the massive amounts of debris, oil and sludge.

Soon, many divers, not only from within Japan but also from overseas including Thailand and the Maldives, offered their cooperation. At the sight of divers eagerly removing debris, fishery cooperative members were also moved to take action.

They offered their support, and the debris-removing operation was being jointly conducted by the divers and fishermen only a half-month after it had begun.

"We have become inseparable friends with the fishermen," Sato said. "The word 'bond' is often used these days, but this is actually emerging between us."

To date, volunteer members have dived in 40 ports and bays, including the Okirai Namiita bathing beach and the Ryori fishing port. The number of divers who have participated in the cleanup effort totals some 2,500.

With the assistance of the volunteers and its own natural regenerative powers, the sea is becoming cleaner little by little. In some spots, fish and other living things have recovered to their numbers before the quake.

However, raging waves sometimes bring debris to cleaned ports and bays. Undeterred, the divers continue to go underwater to restore the ocean to its once pristine condition, while braving the harsh winter cold.

TEPCO's new Fukushima headquarters

January 4, 2013

TEPCO's Fukushima headquarters starts operations

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130104p2g00m0dm036000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. started operating its Fukushima headquarters on Friday to deal with issues stemming from the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

Some 30 employees, including Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, have been assigned to the new headquarters, located in Naraha, about 20 kilometers south of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, according to the utility, known as TEPCO.

The decision to open the headquarters follows criticism of TEPCO's handling of compensation for accident victims and the slow progress of decontamination work since the nuclear crisis broke out in March 2011.

At an opening ceremony, attended by about 80 executives and employees, TEPCO Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe urged redoubled efforts for the reconstruction of Fukushima.

Vice President Ishizaki, who heads the headquarters, said TEPCO will take responsible steps to overcome the accident.

The utility decided to transfer part of its decision-making authority from its Tokyo head office to the local headquarters, which has been set up in "J Village," a former soccer training center now used by those responsible for containing the crisis at the plant.

The company will increase the number of its staff within Fukushima Prefecture by about 500 by the end of this year to more than 4,000.

Meanwhile, Futaba Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa said the town, which has moved its administrative functions to Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, after the nuclear accident, has set a provisional goal of enabling former residents to return to the homeland in 30 years, the half-life of radioactive cesium.

Idogawa said the town will continue decontamination efforts in Futaba in cooperation with the central and prefectural governments, as well as TEPCO, so as to reduce annual exposure to radiation to an internationally recognized upper limit of 1 millisievert.

See also:

Tepco's Fukushima HQ starts operations

Futaba mayor: Citizens may be able to go home after 30 years

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20130105a4.html>

FUKUSHIMA — Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Friday opened a Fukushima headquarters at J Village in Naraha to better deal with redress and other pressing issues related to the nuclear disaster.

The compensation claims Tepco faces are expected to be staggering, as indicated by the mayor of one of the communities uprooted by the radiation calamity who said that if all goes well, people from his town may be able to return to their homes in some 30 years, or the half-life of the radioactive cesium that contaminated their community.

At the Tepco redress HQ in Naraha, about 20 km south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, some 30 employees, including Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, have been assigned, the utility said.

The decision to open the redress headquarters was made in response to criticism that Tepco was dragging its feet in handling compensation claims and hasn't made much progress on decontamination since the crisis began.

At an opening ceremony, attended by about 80 executives and employees, Tepco Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe urged redoubled efforts for the reconstruction of Fukushima.

The utility also plans to give the local headquarters more decision-making authority for its tasks.

The utility will increase its staff within Fukushima Prefecture by about 500 by the end of this year to more than 4,000.

Futaba Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa meanwhile said his town, which has moved its administrative functions to Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, because of the triple-meltdown catastrophe, has set a provisional goal of enabling former residents to return to their homes in 30 years, the half-life of radioactive cesium.

Idogawa said the town will continue decontamination efforts in Futaba in cooperation with the central and prefectural governments, as well as Tepco, to reduce annual exposure to radiation to an internationally recognized upper limit of 1 millisievert.

Staying away for 30 years "realistic goal"

January 4, 2013

Evacuees told they'll need to stay away for a generation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201301050053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

In one of the first estimates of when Fukushima evacuees may return to their homes, the mayor of one nearby town is telling former residents that it could be 30 years away.

Katsutaka Idogawa, mayor of Futaba, a town close to the crisis-struck Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, unveiled the provisional estimate during an address to his staff on Jan. 4.

He said 30 years is a realistic goal because that is roughly the half-life of radioactive cesium-137.

The Futaba town government was itself evacuated, but continues to function from a location in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture.

Idogawa said he would call on the central government, the government of Fukushima Prefecture, and on the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., to carry out thorough decontamination work in Futaba.

And he said he would dedicate those 30 years to improving living conditions for evacuated residents, such as their employment, housing, schooling and medical care.

The central government has made no promises about the return of people who were forced to flee from highly contaminated areas, despite evacuees voicing frustration at being left in limbo.

Idogawa referred to an ongoing bid to re-assess the risk from contamination and perhaps adjust the mandatory exclusion zone. But estimates by the central government say 75 percent of Futaba's 7,000 or so residents at the time of the March 2011 nuclear disaster were living in areas where annual radiation doses now exceed 50 millisieverts. Such areas are expected to be labeled "no-return zones," meaning evacuees cannot return for at least five years.

"Return will be possible only below 1 millisievert," Idogawa said.

Next time...with pets

January 4, 2013

In future evacuations, pets may come too

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201301040007

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Authorities are working to ease bans on animals in evacuee housing, after some families uprooted by the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster suffered further distress when officials told them to shut pets in cars outside--or abandon them altogether.

Not all local governments ban pets in evacuation centers and apartments. But some that do are now rewriting the rules, recognizing the emotional value of pets for people recently made homeless.

"Pets are part of the family," said dog owner and former evacuee Kayoko Suzuki, 51, from Motomiya in Fukushima Prefecture. "Local officials should be more flexible so that families and their pets are not separated during evacuation."

Suzuki fled with her family and three dogs after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 plant in March 2011. She traveled to the distant city of Toyama, in Toyama Prefecture, which offered vacant public housing. But officials there said: no pets.

Suzuki and her family settled in nevertheless, locking the dogs--toy poodles aged 5, 4 and 2--in the car outside. They would take turns in going out to check on the dogs.

Despite this awkward arrangement, the presence of the pets helped Suzuki's family hold up at a time of exhaustion and great stress. They were living in a place where they knew nobody--and they had an uncertain future.

The dogs also broke the ice with local residents when the family took them for walks. People would stop and pet the poodles.

Suzuki's family ended up renting a house from a local animal-lover--a member of an animal protection society--who was happy to allow the dogs in the building. But that was in late March, 2011, and just a few weeks later, the family returned home.

Suzuki said she learned one lesson in particular: Pet owners should prepare. She now stockpiles three months of pet food and toilet sheets for their animals.

Ibaraki Prefecture is among the local governments now addressing calls for change. The tsunami swamped some coastal districts and the quake damaged many homes or left the land beneath them unstable.

Five of the prefecture's 44 local governments ban pets at evacuation centers.

One is Miho village. A Miho official explained that some residents are allergic to or simply don't like animals.

"It is hard to say what pet owners should do in that case, but pets can either be kept in cars or tied up at the abandoned house temporarily," the official said.

In June last year, prefectural authorities established a panel to investigate changes, and it produced a draft proposal recommending that municipalities set up pens for pets at evacuation centers.

Furthermore, prefectural officials are drafting new guidelines for municipalities to refer to when evacuating residents and their pets. Both measures fall under nonbinding environment ministry guidelines.

However, changes will need to clear multiple hurdles at the prefectural and local level.

Ibaraki officials warn it could be some time before all municipalities offer a pets--welcome approach. And ultimately, it is the municipalities, not the prefectural government, that carry out evacuations.

Disaster-struck Iwate Prefecture drew up similar guidelines in November.

These will require owners to possess a cage for their animal and emergency supplies of pet food. They will also urge local governments to set aside space at evacuation centers for the pet cages.

Because of the restrictions in 2011 and 2012, there was considerable demand from dog and cat owners for temporary care for their pets.

One organization that tried to meet this was the Tokyo Metropolitan Animal Relief Center, which was set up in response to the disaster.

Veterinarian Chizuko Yamaguchi, the director, said the center took care of 36 animals--at a cost of about 18 million yen (\$207,000), excluding construction costs.

"If owners and their pets remain together while evacuating, it would save money and reduce the sense of loss," Yamaguchi said. "It will be also good in terms of hygiene and the ecology of the affected area."

The center closed in September.

Meanwhile, some families parted from their pets may have to suffer that loss for ever.

As 29-year-old Yumiko Watanabe scrambled in 2011 to flee her home near the nuclear plant, firefighters urged her to leave behind her 3-year-old cat, Azuki.

Watanabe is currently living in an apartment in Nishi-Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture, with her 8-year-old daughter, Urara, and has returned only once to their abandoned home, in summer that year. The cat was not there.

Watanabe, from Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, has requested help in finding the cat from the prefectural veterinarian association and an animal protection center established by the prefectural government.

Whenever the center's website reports that a cat resembling hers has been found, she visits the center to check. But each time she returns disappointed.

"When I left home, I thought that in a few days' time, I would be returning," she said.

(This article was written by Yosuke Akai and Atsushi Takahashi.)

* * *

TIPS FOR EVACUATION WITH PETS

Find out if your local evacuation center allows pets. If not, find a place that does

Train the pet to accept living in a cage

Try to train a dog not to bark

Keep its vaccinations up to date

Stockpile enough food and water for five days or more

Make sure that the pet wears a name tag or a microchip with contact details

To prepare for the worst--and a possible later hunt for a missing animal--keep photos on your mobile phone

Fukushima people feel like "kimin"

January 6, 2013

Looking back over a year of Fukushima reporting

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130106p2a00m0na004000c.html>



The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is seen in the distance behind farmland now covered in weeds in this photo taken from a Mainichi helicopter in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Oct. 24, 2012. (Mainichi)

In a few months, two years will have passed since the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster. As time goes on, Fukushima Prefecture residents have increasingly voiced worries that they have been discarded or forgotten. Having been in charge of a Mainichi news project on these residents and how their lives have been affected by the nuclear catastrophe, I strongly feel that the true battle to convey the state of Fukushima lies ahead of us.

The Mainichi news project has covered people from various walks of life: a woman angry at no one taking responsibility for the disaster and calling for a group lawsuit; a family that gave up on returning home and moved away; the former mayor of Okuma where the crippled nuclear plant is located; a fisherman who set up a decontamination company and vowed to see the revival of his hometown; a deputy secretary-general at a teachers union who continued to warn about the dangers of radiation while suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Their situations were different, but they shared the **grief** of having their hometowns stolen from them. They also shared **distrust toward a national government** that had steamed ahead with a policy of promoting nuclear power.

An enormous amount of radioactive material was released in the nuclear accident. According to calculations made public in August 2011 by the then Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, the level of cesium-137 alone reached 15,000 terabecquerels. That's 168 times the radioactivity of the cesium-137 released from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Unlike the bomb, which was designed as a weapon to kill vast amounts of people, the Fukushima disaster did not kill anyone with acute radiation poisoning. However, radioactive material spread from Fukushima, and areas with levels of cesium contamination that should have warranted their establishment as radiation controlled zones extend northwest of the plant and to the reaches of the Tohoku region's Abukuma River. People living in the 20-kilometer no-go zone around the plant were forced to leave, while others outside the zone who feared the health effects of radiation also evacuated to other areas. As of November 2012, 58,608 people had evacuated out of Fukushima Prefecture, and 98,680 people had evacuated to other locations within the prefecture.

Due to differences in people's thinking about the risks of radiation, residents splintered over what food they should eat, whether they should evacuate or return to their homes, and whether or not they should let their children play outside. Beyond the tsunami-hit coastal areas, beautiful, calm countryside remained, but the people's hometowns, where they had spent their whole lives, were snatched away from them.

The national government has invested 1.5 trillion yen to lower radiation levels in a process that continues. Radiation levels have been lowered at grade schools and preschools, which has allowed children to return to playgrounds. Some places have agreed to be surveyed as candidate locations for the construction of mid-term containment vessels for contaminated soil -- a necessary part of decontamination efforts. However, critics have raised doubts about the effectiveness of decontamination efforts, saying that radioactive materials seeping from forests will only result in recontamination.

A Diet panel report on the nuclear calamity clearly labeled it a "man-made" disaster, while stating it was possible that the disaster was caused not only by tsunami-damage on March 11, 2011, but also by damage from the magnitude-9.0 earthquake that triggered the tsunami. The national government announced that the plant had achieved a cold shutdown, but a true wrap-up of the catastrophe is still nowhere in sight. Meanwhile, stockpiles of spent nuclear fuel continue to grow the longer nuclear power plants remain in operation. The dangers posed by this situation came under scrutiny following temperature rises in the Fukushima No. 1 plant's fuel pool at its No. 4 reactor. No methods to dispose of this waste have yet surfaced.

On Dec. 7, 2012, a magnitude-7.4 earthquake struck off the Sanriku coast, and a one-meter tsunami was recorded. Experts warn of an aftershock of yet larger magnitude, together with the possibilities of huge plate-based quakes in the Tokai, Tonankai, and Nankai regions, and a large quake on the Sea of Japan side of the country. It is said that the Japanese archipelago has entered into a period of quake activity. Yet despite being one of the world's most earthquake-prone nations, Japan is home to more than 50 nuclear reactors -- and a host of unsolved problems accompanying them.

Toshiki Kokubun, deputy secretary-general of the Fukushima Prefecture Teachers Union, said that the people of Fukushima Prefecture have been treated as "kimin," or abandoned people, by the national government. That term is often heard in discussions about the pre-World War II policy of development in and immigration to northeast China that produced Japanese war-displaced children.

That issue and what has gone on in Fukushima Prefecture cannot be treated the same way. But, as we leave the second New Year since the disaster behind us, I want politicians to seriously reflect on the fact that this ominous term has entered the hearts of people living in Fukushima as they fear the risks of radiation. (By Shigeki Yutani, Regional News Department)

Recovery?

January 8, 2013

Fukushima fireworks festival offers prayers for recovery from quake, nuclear crisis



Fireworks are launched into the night sky during the "Uneme no sato" winter fireworks festival in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, on Jan. 7. (Mainichi)

KORIYAMA, Fukushima -- A winter fireworks festival was held here for the first time in two years on Jan. 7, entertaining spectators and sending up prayers for the area's recovery from the quake and nuclear disasters.

Some 1,000 fireworks were launched into the night sky by pyrotechnicians from across the country during the festival called "Uneme no sato fuyu hanabi" in Koriyama. The annual event was cancelled last year due to the aftereffects of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

"I launched the fireworks with my wishes for spectators to become positive about their future as much as possible," said a 33-year-old pyrotechnician from the prefectural city of Sukagawa

Support for Fukushima children

January 8, 2012

Fukushima children recuperate at center on Okinawa island

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130107003254.htm>

Jiji Press

A recuperation center set up on Kumejima island in Okinawa Prefecture is providing support for children affected by the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture.

Kumi no Sato, located about 100 kilometers west of Naha, was set up by nonprofit organization Okinawa Kumi no Sato in the aftermath of the nuclear crisis as part of efforts to help maintain the health of disaster-afflicted children in Fukushima.

The facility, which opened in July 2012, is **modeled after a recuperation center in Belarus set up in 1994 for child victims of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear crisis**. Photojournalist Ryuichi Hirokawa, 69, who has been involved in the running of the recuperation center, is using his experience to manage Kumi no Sato.

The facility for Fukushima children was built on the site of a former pottery studio in the town of Kumejima. So far, about 300 children from Fukushima have been invited for two-week stays free of charge, including airfare. **During their stays, children can enjoy the natural environment of Kumejima island and eat food without worries of radiation safety.**

The program also provides comprehensive thyroid examinations for the children. Starting from June, it plans to hold a "study camp" program in which school children from Fukushima will be able to study and recuperate with their teachers, Hirokawa said.

Kumi no Sato operates solely on donations that come mainly from individuals, although 80 percent of the financing of its model facility in Belarus, the Hope 21 center, is covered by the government. The Japanese project is run by a handful of regular staff, with help from unpaid volunteers including residents of Kumejima.

Central database on 3/11

January 9, 2013

National archive to compile 300,000 items related to 3/11 quake

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201301090053

By SATOSHI DAIGUJI/ Staff Writer

With the mountain of photos, videos, documents and records related to the Great East Japan Earthquake still fresh, the government wants to compile them into a central database for easy access and preservation.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, jointly with the National Diet Library, on Jan. 10 will start tests of a "Great East Japan Earthquake Archive," an integrated data management system for more than 100,000 items related to the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

It plans to complete the system in early March and increase the number of items to more than 300,000, including related data.

The archive will collectively manage data that is currently kept by local governments affected by the disaster, the news media, universities, nonprofit organizations, private companies and others.

The new system will allow users to locate photos taken in devastated areas and interviews conducted there, proceedings of investigatory committees on the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident and other data through a National Diet Library website.

Some of the photos and videos will be offered with information on the locations where they were taken, which will be shown on a map.

A wide range of pictures and videos were taken following the 2011 disaster by groups and individuals and posted on the Internet. However, online data is prone to frequent updates and often become unavailable when their URLs--addresses on the Internet--expire.

The ministry has studied ways to enable permanent preservation, said a senior ministry official.

By attaching common tags, such as locations and dates, to data, the archive will enable searches across databases.

Some of the data will be kept in a dedicated server, for the National Diet Library to maintain over a long period. The ministry intends to enhance comprehensive listing functions of the data to use it for disaster prevention measures and education.

The ministry will release a prototype of the archive on Jan. 10, and complete the system in early March after verifying copyright issues and other terms of use.



A woman cries in Natori, Miyagi Prefecture, two days after the area was devastated by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

Adapting public facilities to nuclear disasters

January 10, 2013

Hospitals, other facilities near N-plants to be refitted

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130109003780.htm>

The Cabinet Office has decided to promote renovating hospitals and other public facilities within a five-kilometer radius of a nuclear plant to enable patients and the elderly to stay indoors if they cannot be easily evacuated in the event of a nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

About 12 billion yen is planned to be allocated for the measure in a supplementary budget for fiscal 2012, and will also cover the cost of supplying dosimeters to public facilities, according to an informed source.

Buildings that will be covered under the measure include hospitals, facilities for the elderly and schools within a five-kilometer radius of a nuclear plant.

These buildings will be refitted with airtight doors and windows to keep out radioactive materials released by a damaged nuclear power plant, as well as ventilation filters to remove such materials.

The budget will be provided as grants to prefectures hosting nuclear power plants.

Under the disaster management guidelines compiled by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, residents living within five kilometers of a nuclear plant must be evacuated as soon as possible in the event of a nuclear disaster.

However, when the nuclear crisis occurred at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, some bedridden hospital patients near the plant died after being forced to evacuate long distances.

Therefore, municipalities near nuclear power plants have called on the central government to help create facilities that can house the elderly and patients who may have difficulty evacuating immediately or on their own in the event of a nuclear disaster.

TEPCO feeling generous

January 10, 2013

TEPCO intends to accept compensation claims beyond legal time limit

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130110p2g00m0dm071000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Thursday that it intends to accept compensation claims over the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster beyond the three-year legal time limit for seeking compensation.

"We do not intend at all to say 'that's it' after three years...We hope not to create concerns among the people affected," the utility's President Naomi Hirose told Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato in Fukushima Prefecture, adding that his company is now discussing in detail the legal matters concerning the issue.

Hirose said that his company plans to announce in the near future how it will respond to the problem.

Sato, meanwhile, reiterated his request to scrap not only the crippled Nos. 1 to 4 units at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but also the remaining Nos. 5 and 6 units that achieved a cold shutdown in the early stage of the nuclear disaster, as well as the Fukushima Daini plant, located adjacent to the Daiichi complex.

"I have also told Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that it is the collective will of the people in the prefecture to decommission all the reactors (in the prefecture)," the governor said.

TEPCO has so far only made clear that it will scrap the Nos. 1 to 4 reactors. Hirose told reporters later that his company will make a decision on the issue "in a comprehensive manner" in relation to the national energy policy.

First meeting at new TEPCO headquarters

January 11, 2013

TEPCO execs hold 1st meeting at its new Fukushima headquarters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130111p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Friday held its first meeting at its new Fukushima headquarters to discuss compensation and decontamination issues resulting from the nuclear disaster in 2011, the worst since Chernobyl.

Among those attending the meeting at the headquarters, established Jan. 1, were TEPCO Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe, President Naomi Hirose and Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki.

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, which was crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, set up the new office after facing criticism for slow progress in its processing of compensation claims and decontamination work.

The Fukushima headquarters is located in the town of Naraha, about 20 kilometers south of the crippled nuclear power plant.

TEPCO Fukushima rebuilding office has 1st meeting

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130111_23.html

The meeting on Friday came one week after TEPCO launched the Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters in Naraha Town, about 20 kilometers south of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi plant. The office was set up to respond to criticism that the utility is slow to compensate and decontaminate after the disaster at the plant.

TEPCO Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe and President Naomi Hirose were among 30 executive and other officials at the meeting.

TEPCO says the executives decided at the meeting to transfer some of the clerical functions of the firm's Tokyo head office to Fukushima in about 2 years. The Fukushima office plans to hire about 10 people locally in the fiscal year starting in April as part of efforts to create jobs in the prefecture.

The meeting resulted in no decisions on specific compensation or decontamination projects.

TEPCO Executive Vice President and Fukushima office head Yoshiyuki Ishizaki says the executives recognize the significance of compensation and decontamination, but failed to agree.

Ishizaki says the utility will continue to discuss the matters while seeking opinions of local governments.

TEPCO plans to hold Fukushima headquarters meetings every 3 months.

Higher death rate among older evacuees

January 11, 2013

Death rates spike among elderly evacuees from Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301110086>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

Former residents of nursing homes near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant died at a higher rate than usual in 2011, a study has shown, likely because of the stress of evacuation and having to live in temporary accommodations such as draughty school gyms.

Researchers from the Fukushima Medical University studied reports submitted to the Fukushima prefectural government by 34 institutions for the elderly and found that **the death rate over eight months in 2011 was 2.4 times that of the same period in 2010.**

Furthermore, there was **a spike in deaths during the three months immediately following the disaster to three times the level of a year earlier.**

The studied data was for March to October 2011 and covered the residents of care homes within 20 kilometers of the plant--the mandatory evacuation zone--whose doors were locked, but which continued to function administratively as the patients were sent elsewhere.

During this period, pneumonia accounted for 40 percent of deaths, whereas it usually accounts for only 10 percent of deaths of those aged 65 or more.

The high toll was likely caused by **insufficient disaster preparations and the effect on frail individuals of uncomfortable conditions in evacuation shelters.**

Of all 1,770 residents living at the 34 institutions at the time of the disaster, 295 had died by the end of October 2011. An additional 32 died in the tsunami. By comparison, only 109 died in the same period in 2010.

The evacuees included a wide range of residents, ranging from the bedridden to those who could mostly take care of themselves.

When the central government ordered that the 20-kilometer zone be vacated, all residents were dispatched initially to local hospitals and school halls. Later, many likely moved to nursing homes or equivalent institutions further afield in Fukushima Prefecture and across Japan.

"They may have developed bronchitis in shelters that were too chilly, or pneumonia due to insufficient care," said Seiji Yasumura, a member of the research team and a public hygiene professor at the Fukushima Medical University.

The report, published in November in a British science journal, also revealed that few, if any, of the nursing homes had emergency power systems or the stocks of food and bottled water needed in an evacuation.

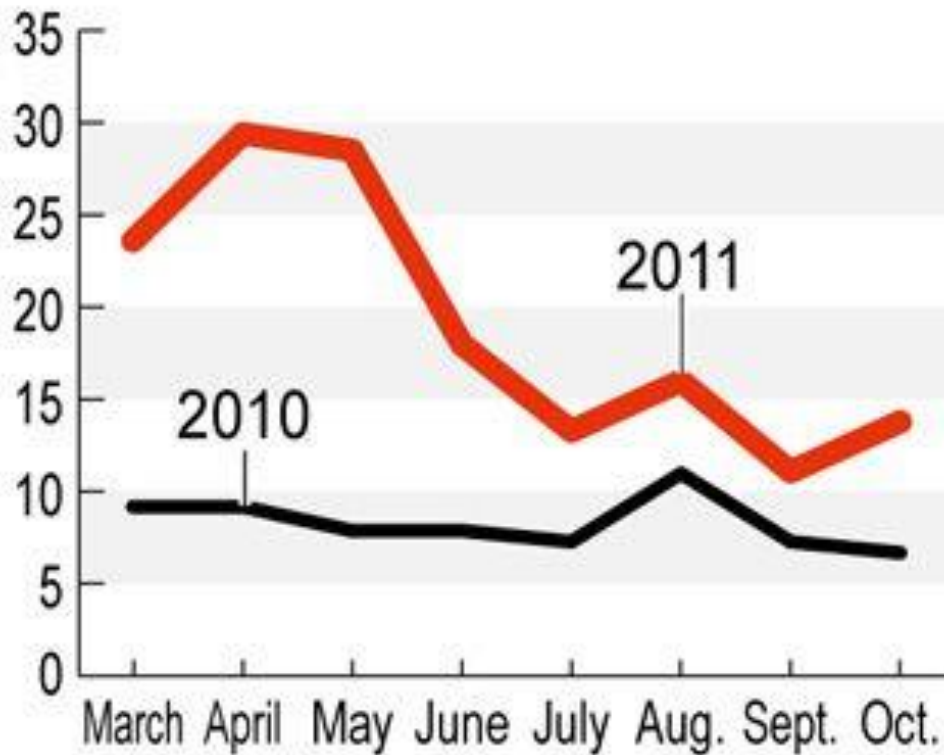
Central and local government committees on nuclear disaster preparedness have proposed that in the future, vulnerable patients remain at their institutions until there is a satisfactory means of moving them somewhere safer. Committee members argued this would make it less of an ordeal.

But that assumes hospitals and other institutions have emergency power systems and stocks of food, water and blankets.

"The latest study revealed the surveyed facilities lacked concrete evacuation plans and procedures, and furthermore had not conducted evacuation drills," Yasumura said.

"Hospitals are better prepared for disasters than institutions for the elderly," he added. "The central and local governments need to address this."

Death toll per 1,000 evacuees from nursing homes within 20 km of Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant



Note: Toll of March 2011 excludes 32 deaths from tsunami

Relocate communities as a whole?

January 12, 2013

Community bonds come into focus as plans to relocate evacuees move forward

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2013/01/11/20130111p2a00m0na014000c/001.html>

Evacuees of the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster are highlighting the importance of community bonds as local bodies move forward with plans to relocate them from temporary dwellings to full-fledged public recovery housing.

After the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, communities were split up as a result of priority being placed on speedy relocations, which eventually led to a spate of solitary deaths. Now, one year and 10 months after the March 2011 earthquake disaster, residents have expressed concerns of a similar situation occurring.

"If they choose people to enter public recovery housing through a draw, then the bonds that residents have gone to the trouble of forming will be broken up. Many people are worried about being placed in unfamiliar surroundings," said Yuichi Abe, 54, a resident of a temporary housing complex in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture.

The residents of temporary housing units where evacuees currently reside were chosen in a draw, and about 220 households from various regions came together. Abe was involved in selecting heads for each block of units, passing around notice boards and staging events to gradually build up a sense of community. In June last year, he formed a residents group calling for communities to be relocated as a whole, and he collected about 250 signatures, which he submitted to the Ishinomaki Municipal Government together with an official request.

Abe, who has a chest ailment and can't always get about freely, has himself been supported by the bonds of the local community. Having himself suffered depression in the past, he has lent an ear to the people who suffered depression after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

"Rather than just giving the elderly and disabled priority, communities should be moved as whole units," Abe says. "If that's viable, then we can wait, even if construction is delayed."

Residents of another temporary housing community in Sendai's Taihaku Ward that consists of about 225 households enlisted the help of architectural experts to have an 11-story public housing complex built for them, saying they didn't want to break up the bonds they had formed while living in temporary dwellings. The Sendai Municipal Government is set to implement a system under which it buys restoration housing constructed and designed by public companies. Residents of the Taihaku Ward temporary housing complex intend to get involved, but there is still no guarantee that they will all be able to make the move together.

For people due to move in groups from areas where there is a risk of tsunami damage to higher ground or areas further inland, the municipal government is allowing people to move to new housing that they want to enter without drawing lots, and it plans to make special application slots for households with disabled or elderly people. When dividing up the remaining places, it will accept applications from groups that take community bonds into consideration, such as the community in Taihaku Ward, but officials say they are still considering how big they will allow such groups to be. If only 10 or so households are permitted, the communities won't be able to hold together.

While local bodies are aware of the importance of community spirit in the shift to public recovery housing, officials are still considering how to reflect this in the standards for permitting people to enter new housing. In November last year, the city of Ishinomaki set up a consultative body comprising residents and experts to discuss the issue. This month they will compile their opinions and then formulate standards.

In July last year, the Miyagi Prefectural Government presented guidelines for the preparation of public recovery housing. But its methods, such as holding workshops with residents, were vague.

Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai commented, "It's an issue involving local cities and towns, and the prefectural government can't say what they should do."

The Iwate Prefectural Government drew up its own guidelines for preparing public recovery housing in September 2012, saying it was considering forgoing holding draws when people moved to small housing complexes constructed for fishing villages and other such communities.

"In addition to speed and fairness, it's important to think about people's lives after they move in," a representative of the prefecture's home construction division said.

Recovery center for Fukushima children

January 15, 2013

Okinawa center offers respite for Fukushima kids

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20130115a2.html>

Jiji

A center set up on Kumejima Island in Okinawa is providing active recovery support for children affected by the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture.

Kumi No Sato, some 100 km west of Naha, Okinawa's capital, was set up by the nonprofit organization Okinawa Kumi No Sato after the nuclear crisis began in March 2011 as a way to help disaster-afflicted children in Fukushima stay healthy.

The facility, which opened last July, is modeled after a recuperation center in Belarus set up in 1994 for child victims of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. Photojournalist Ryuichi Hirokawa, 69, who helped run the center, is using his experience there to manage Kumi No Sato.

The facility was built on the site of a former pottery studio in the town of Kumejima. So far, some 300 children from Fukushima have been invited for two-week stays free of charge, including airfare.

Hirokawa, chairman of the NPO, said the visiting children can put aside their radiation fears and fully enjoy Kumejima's natural beauty.

The program also provides comprehensive thyroid examinations for the children, who can also enjoy food untainted by radiation.

Starting this June, it plans to hold a "study camp," in which schoolchildren from Fukushima will be able to study and interact with their teachers, Hirokawa said.

Kumi No Sato runs solely on donations, which come mainly from individuals, although 80 percent of the financing for its model facility in Belarus, the Hope 21 center, is covered by the government.

The Japanese project is run by a handful of regular staff, with help from unpaid volunteers, including residents of Kumejima.

Hope 21 director Wjatscheslaw Makuschinskij told a news conference in Tokyo in December that both support of the government and the help of citizens are essential to keep such projects running.

Fukushima reconstruction bureau strengthened

January 14, 2013

Fukushima agency gets boost / Reconstruction bureau to get more staff, chief to be upgraded

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130113003093.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The government plans to strengthen the Fukushima reconstruction bureau, a branch of the Reconstruction Agency, to accelerate recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

It will reorganize the bureau to become a more powerful base for supporting rehabilitation in Fukushima Prefecture. It also plans to increase the number of staff, which is currently about 40. The head of the new organization will be upgraded from deputy director general level to bureau chief.

The reorganization aims to help the Fukushima branch of the agency be more effective as a front-line decision-making authority for the area's reconstruction. The move is being initiated following instructions from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who considers the bureau as more than a mere branch of the agency, saying it is "one of two head offices."

Abe intends to accelerate progress in reconstruction efforts by reorganizing the system so that requests made by affected areas can be dealt with quickly.

Abe visited Miyagi Prefecture on Saturday to get a better grasp on the actual situation in disaster-hit areas. He inspected a shipbuilding plant and a seafood processing facility in Ishinomaki, both of which were destroyed by tsunami on March 11, 2011.

In Iwanuma, he inspected a construction site for a group of residents who are awaiting relocation to higher ground. In Watari, he talked with victims living in temporary housing units.

Abe's visit to areas affected by the disaster was his second, following the first to Fukushima late last year. Abe told reporters, "I'll compile a budget for the next fiscal year based on the concept that revitalization is impossible without reconstructing these affected areas."

Asbestos and dismantling

January 14, 2013

(Jan. 14, 2013)

Asbestos safety measures lacking as workers dismantle buildings in disaster areas



A restaurant being dismantled, with sheets to stop the spread of asbestos, is seen in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, on Jan. 9. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130114p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Work to remove asbestos when dismantling buildings in areas hard-hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake is not always being done properly, resulting in the spread of the harmful fibers.

At the site of a restaurant in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture -- a city where close to 4,000 people died or went missing in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami -- dismantling work was forced to be halted for two months as the area was covered by sheets to prevent the spread of asbestos. Asbestos had originally been found to be exposed and to have spread at the site by Tokyo Occupational Safety & Health Center, an NPO, in December 2011. Dismantling work began in August 2012 after work to remove the asbestos, but a recheck by the NPO found that not all the asbestos had been removed, and it had spread to neighboring lots.

The company has been involved with over 100 asbestos removal projects, and it had taken all of the asbestos it could find from the inside of the building's walls. However, there was also asbestos on the exterior of pillars that it had failed to account for. Because it thought it had removed all the asbestos, its workers didn't wear adequate protection.

"There is no established method for asbestos removal. It's safe if you completely cover the building from the beginning, but customers try to keep down costs, so there are also difficulties on the cost side," said a representative of the firm.

A city representative said, "Building blueprints were washed away in the tsunami, and confirming whether or not there is asbestos is difficult." Based on waste from dismantling, the city estimates that since the quake there have been around 1,200 structure dismantling sites that had asbestos in them.

However, companies show little awareness about anti-asbestos measures. A survey in June and July by the Ishinomaki labor standards supervising body found that of 110 companies handling 122 sites, only around 59 percent said they had "correctly carried out" pre-dismantling checks for asbestos. Furthermore, only around 56 percent had people making sure that workers used safety masks.

In November 2011, asbestos levels up to 36 times the World Health Organization's safety limit of 10 strands per liter of air were found at the site of a hotel dismantling site in front of Sendai Station. According to city officials, workers had been opening holes in the floors to toss down waste materials, leading to the spread of asbestos that had been in the steel frames of the floor.

An official of the Ishinomaki Municipal Government said, "We have to rely on businesses without dismantling experience or without asbestos knowledge because of the high number of projects. Miyagi Prefecture has few asbestos-removing companies." The official also said that the city needed a new system of support from the national government.

Speed up compensation and decontamination

January 14, 2013

Editorial: TEPCO and gov't must rush to bring relief to disaster victims

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130114p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, set up its Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters in Fukushima on Jan. 1. This show of solidarity with local communities as a company that dealt a massive blow to the lives of prefectural residents -- albeit belatedly -- is worthy of recognition.

Local communities are critical of TEPCO due to the time it is taking for the company to compensate disaster victims. TEPCO must regain residents' trust by speeding up the compensation and decontamination processes, and by helping to rebuild residents' lives.

The Revitalization Headquarters is located at J Village, an athletic complex located in the towns of Naraha and Hirono, which has been used as a base for workers dealing with the nuclear disaster since its outbreak. Based at the headquarters is TEPCO Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, who in the past served as plant manager of the Fukushima No. 2 Nuclear Power Plant, and has close ties with local communities. One could say that TEPCO's decision to dispatch Ishizaki to its Fukushima headquarters is a way to show its intention to take responsibility for the crisis.

However, nearly two years since the disaster broke out, local residents are still suffering. Some 160,000 people are still evacuated. What those people want are concrete changes as soon as possible.

Due in part to TEPCO's heretofore disingenuous behavior, distrust toward the utility runs deep among locals. TEPCO must set up a well-functioning structure to respond to residents' demands to overcome this current situation, but at the moment, the prospects are shaky.

The Revitalization Headquarters is manned by approximately 3,500 people. This, however, includes those handling work at the Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 nuclear power plants, meaning that the number of staff left to handle compensation and decontamination work -- tasks that were relegated completely to the Revitalization Headquarters by TEPCO headquarters -- is just 1,500.

The plan is to increase this number by about 500 by the end of this year, but whether a staff of such size can handle the tremendous amount of work involved is questionable. In fact, because the process of identifying the owners of land and buildings in evacuation zones has been slow-going, paperwork that must be filed to claim damages for compensation payments has yet to be sent out to property owners.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose told Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato that the utility would not claim the extinctive prescription for damage compensation, which stands at three years from when the victim identifies the damage and the party at fault. That is only reasonable. TEPCO must dedicate itself to strengthening the Revitalization Headquarters framework and speed up its compensation efforts.

As a result of the nuclear disaster, population outflow and decline in employment have continued in Fukushima Prefecture. If TEPCO's plans to build a state-of-the-art coal-fired thermal power plant and establish a research institute dedicated to the decommissioning of nuclear reactors are realized, they will create jobs and contribute to rebuilding lives in local communities.

Still, it is impossible for a company like TEPCO, which has effectively been nationalized, to build a major power station on its own without state assistance. The same can be said of the research institute.

The government has decided to enhance the capacity of the Reconstruction Agency and centralize reconstruction policy, while stationing senior agency officials in Fukushima Prefecture. The government and TEPCO must work in step with each other to truly rebuild life in Fukushima.

Not brilliant

January 15, 2013

Only 40% of buildings built before 1981 meet current quake-resistance standards

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130115p2a00m0na017000c.html>

About 43.7 percent of some 150,000 office buildings and large-scale stores built in Japan before 1981 meet current quake-resistance standards, and only 36.6 percent of all large buildings with floor space of at least 5,000 square meters meet such standards, according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism.

Because the survey found that only about 60 percent of the buildings had been checked for earthquake resistance, the infrastructure ministry has decided to require all buildings to go through checks for earthquake resistance. The ministry is to submit to the upcoming regular Diet session a bill to revise the

Act for Promotion of Renovation for Earthquake-Resistant Structures. The ministry also plans to expand support measures to include aid to cover expenses to make buildings quake-resistant, among other steps. The current quake-resistance standards were introduced in 1981 in the wake of the 1978 Miyagi earthquake which left 28 people dead.

In August 2012, the infrastructure ministry conducted a questionnaire for people in office buildings, large-scale stores, schools, hospitals and other structures where many people gather in 46 prefectures, with the exception of Fukushima Prefecture stricken by the ongoing nuclear crisis. The ministry compiled the results of the survey of 150,346 structures with a floor space of at least 1,000 square meters. Of all the structures surveyed, 59.6 percent of them have been checked for earthquake resistance, while 55.8 percent of the structures with a floor space of at least 5,000 square meters have gone through quake-resistance tests.

The survey found that the larger the buildings were, the lower the chances of them being checked for quake resistance tended to be. The survey has found that 44.7 percent of structures with a floor space of between 1,000 square meters and less than 2,000 square meters meet the current quake-resistance standards, followed by 45.1 percent for structures with a floor space of between 2,000 square meters and less than 3,000 square meters, 41.7 percent for structures with a floor space of between 3,000 square meters and less than 5,000 square meters, and 36.6 percent for those structures with a floor space of at least 5,000 square meters. A floor space of 1,000 square meters is generally equivalent to the floor space of a school gymnasium.

Earthquake-resistance tests are conducted by architects and other experts to analyze resistance to the shaking of buildings. The Act for Promotion of Renovation for Earthquake-Resistant Structures stipulates that efforts should be made to test old structures for earthquake resistance and renovate them to secure their quake resistance required under the new standards. **But the stipulation is not legally binding.** Therefore, the infrastructure ministry plans to make quake-resistance tests obligatory. The ministry is likely to subject those structures along emergency transportation and evacuation routes, as well as those buildings that can function as disaster-prevention facilities, to mandatory quake-resistance tests. The ministry is also considering punishing the owners of buildings who neglect their legal obligations.

Does Gov't understand the real situation?

January 19, 2013

Waste undermines reconstruction

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20130119a1.html>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has declared that he will scrap the ¥19 trillion cap the Democratic Party of Japan government had set on the reconstruction budget for areas devastated by the 3/11 triple disasters. He is intent on boosting the image of his administration and the Liberal Democratic Party before the Upper House election next summer.

But his policy is fraught with problems. Mr. Abe appears to think that simply boosting the size of the budget will ensure the reconstruction's smooth progress, but the record so far suggests otherwise.

For fiscal 2011, ¥14.92 trillion was allocated for use in reconstruction-related projects. But ¥5.87 trillion or 39.4 percent was not used by the end of fiscal 2011 on March 31.

The DPJ government at the time decided to carry ¥4.76 trillion or 32 percent over to fiscal 2012, and not use the remaining ¥1.10 trillion or 7.4 percent. It is extremely regrettable that about 40 percent of a budget intended to help municipalities and residents severely hit by the disasters was left unused.

This was largely the result of the central government's failure to set up a system to smoothly process local government requests for budget money to fund community-resuscitation projects, and to disburse requested money in a timely manner.

Many disaster-hit areas were also unable to use all the money that they had received from the reconstruction budget due to attached conditions or a lack of resources, such as construction workers and engineering officials to supervise work, and were forced to carry forward the unused money to the next account.

Reacting coolly to Mr. Abe's declaration, an official of a municipality in Tohoku said, "We have not yet reached a stage in which an increased budget will instantly translate into real reconstruction." One can't help wondering whether Mr. Abe really understands the situation at the local level.

Last year it was found that the reconstruction budget was also used to fund numerous projects outside the disaster areas. Despite criticism, ministry requests for the fiscal 2013 reconstruction budget still include dubious projects because the LDP demanded that money from the budget also be used for disaster-prevention projects outside the disaster areas.

It also recently surfaced that the work to clean up areas contaminated with radioactive substances from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is being carried out in a slipshod manner that ignores rules to prevent secondary contamination. It appears that large construction companies have been favored over small firms with better technology.

One wonders whether the government has the will or the ability to properly manage the cleanup work.

Out of the ¥19 trillion budget cap, the government has already earmarked about ¥17 trillion for reconstruction purposes. The Abe administration's economic stimulus package also includes ¥1.6 trillion for the same purposes. Income, corporate and resident tax raises will cover ¥10.5 trillion of the ¥19 trillion.

If the Abe administration scraps the cap, it may have to rely on bond issuance. This may weaken trust of state finances and lead to a rise in long-term interest rates.

People and opposition parties must scrutinize the reconstruction budget for fiscal 2013.

Fukushima not ready for March deadline

January 21, 2012

70% of towns behind in N-plans / Municipalities struggling to prepare disaster measures by March deadline

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130120003311.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Fourteen of 20 cities, towns and villages in Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures still have not compiled their disaster management plans despite a looming deadline in March, according to a Yomiuri Shimbun survey.

The 20 municipal governments are required to prepare the plans as they are located in areas where measures for responding to potential nuclear emergencies have been deemed necessary.

Their inability to finalize the plans is apparently due to challenges arising from the fact that many residents are not living in the towns at present. Many evacuated after the crisis broke out at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, or now live in other places due to tsunami.

In October, the Nuclear Regulation Authority expanded the areas where disaster management plans to protect residents from radiation are required. Previously, locations within an eight- to 10-kilometer radius of nuclear power plants were subject to the plans, but the radius distance is now 30 kilometers.

Of the 14 municipal governments that still lack concrete plans, nine said they are unsure whether they can compile the plans by the deadline, including Higashi-Matsushima, Misato and Minami-Sanriku in Miyagi Prefecture and Naraha, Tomioka, Okuma, Katsurao, Iitate and Ono in Fukushima Prefecture. Five governments said they will definitely not be able to prepare the plans by March: Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture and Minami-Soma, Hirono, Futaba and Namie in Fukushima Prefecture.

Seven municipalities are near Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Onagawa nuclear power plant in Miyagi Prefecture and 13 are near the Fukushima Nos. 1 and 2 plants in Fukushima Prefecture.

The Yomiuri Shimbun conducted its survey in December on the 20 municipalities and 19 of them responded.

A government ordinance related to a law that established the NRA stipulates the regional plans, in which evacuation procedures and destinations will be designated, should be completed within six months of the NRA's launch. Thus the deadline for the municipal governments is March 18.

In the survey, only four municipal governments--those of Tome and Onagawa in Miyagi Prefecture and Tamura and Kawauchi in Fukushima Prefecture--replied they will meet the deadline for compiling their respective plans.

The town government of Minami-Sanriku said it is not certain whether it will be able to complete its plan. Part of the town is within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant.

Residents living in that part of the town number about 2,300, according to data of the Basic Resident Register. But a town government official said, "We can't confirm the actual number because there are residents who have evacuated."

The town government also has not decided how to distribute stable iodine pills to residents who have evacuated.

The official said, "There are too many variable factors and thus we can't decide on specific measures for our regional disaster management plan."

The city government of Higashi-Matsushima also replied it is uncertain whether it can finish its plan.

Its city center, including the city government office, is within the 30-kilometer target zone. About 37,000 residents live in the area.

Regarding potential evacuation destinations, the municipal government said it intends to discuss the matter with neighboring municipalities, including Osaki in the prefecture.

The city government said the Miyagi prefectural government is checking on the availability of taxis and trucks that would be necessary for emergency evacuation.

An official of the city government commented, "Because so many residents will need to evacuate, compiling the disaster management plan is very hard."

In Fukushima Prefecture, 10 of the 13 municipalities required to compile the plans are located in areas that were evacuated during the Fukushima nuclear plant crisis. Most have still not finished the work.

An official of the town government of Tomioka, which has relocated its functions to an evacuation site, said: "All of the town's residents left in the evacuation. As infrastructure has still not been restored, it's difficult to compile the plan."

An official of the NRA's nuclear regulatory agency said: "Most of the former residents of designated municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have evacuated. So we understand it's difficult for them to complete the plans. We hope the municipal governments will progress with the work as quickly as possible."

Effect of tsunami on seizures

January 21, 2013

Study: Japan tsunami stress may have brought on seizures

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201301210115

REUTERS

The number of seizure patients in a northern Japanese fishing community devastated by the March 11, 2011 tsunami spiked in the weeks following the disaster, according to a Japanese study.

The study, published in the journal *Epilepsia*, looked at 440 patient records from Kesenuma City Hospital, in a city that was devastated by the massive tsunami touched off by the 9.0 magnitude earthquake.

Thirteen patients were admitted with seizures in the eight weeks after the disaster, but only one had been admitted in the two months before March 11.

Previous research has linked stressful life-threatening disasters with an increased risk of seizures, but most case reports lacked clinical data with multiple patients.

"We suggest that stress associated with life-threatening situations may enhance seizure generation," wrote lead author Ichiyo Shibahara, a staff neurosurgeon at Sendai Medical Center in northern Japan. But he added that stress itself is not a universal risk factor for seizures.

"Most of the seizure patients had some sort of neurological disease before the earthquake," he said. His team examined medical records from patients admitted to the neurosurgery ward in the eight weeks before and after the March 11 disaster and compared them to the same time period each year between 2008 and 2010.

In 2008, there were 11 seizure patients admitted between January 14 and May 15. In 2009, there were seven and in 2010, just four.

Of the 13 admitted after the disaster, 11 had preexisting brain disorders that included epilepsy, head injuries or stroke. All the patients lived independently, and eight took anti-convulsive medication.

Shibahara noted that of the five patients admitted just days after the tsunami, it was "not because of a lack of anticonvulsants, but because of the stress."

One later patient, though, was unable to refill his medication weeks after the devastation.

"This is interesting, but I'm not 100 percent convinced," said William Theodore, senior investigator of the clinical epilepsy section at the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Maryland.

Theodore, who was not involved in the study, told Reuters health that because the number of patients was so small, random variation could explain the surge in seizures. Upset patients may also have forgotten to take, or weren't able to find, anticonvulsant drugs.

There are also various ways that natural disasters might cause seizures, including head trauma, infections from polluted water or a lack of sleep, he added.

But the study did have a practical take home message, he said: "If you already have seizures and you're taking medication, always make sure you have a decent supply just in case some natural disaster occurs."

SOURCE: <http://bit.ly/V6aiPN>

TEPCO executives questioned

January 24, 2013

Prosecutors question former TEPCO executives

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130124_27.html

Japanese prosecutors have questioned 2 former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Company in connection with the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

Sources have told NHK that the 2 are TEPCO's former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former president Masataka Shimizu.

The prosecutors are believed to have asked them to explain what kind of measures their company had taken against tsunami risk and how likely they had predicted such an accident would be.

Fukushima residents are accusing the government and TEPCO officials at the time of the accident of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

Some legal experts say it may be difficult to hold individuals criminally responsible for the accident.

They say that's because the prosecutors need to prove the disaster was predictable. The prosecutors also need evidence to prove the health impact of radiation from the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The prosecutors are believed to be proceeding cautiously with their investigation into the case.
Jan. 24, 2013 - Updated 09:06 UTC (18:06 JST)

Idogawa gives up

January 24, 2013

Frustrated mayor of Fukushima town to quit



Futaba Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa is interviewed at the former Kisai High School in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, on Jan. 23. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130124p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The mayor of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Futaba has announced his resignation, becoming the first mayor of a municipality in nuclear evacuation zones to leave his post.

Futaba Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa expressed his intention to resign to the Futaba Municipal Assembly on Jan. 23, saying his management of the town failed to gain understanding from residents. The entire town has been designated as a no-go zone in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

"I felt I wasn't gaining understanding during resident hearings and on other occasions. I was also targeted with no-confidence motions three times," Idogawa told the Mainichi Shimbun in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, where the town's office functions have been relocated.

Idogawa had earlier opposed the central government's plans to set up an interim storage facility in Futaba or elsewhere for radioactive soil amassed from decontamination work, and to realign no-go zones around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, on the grounds that high radiation levels in Futaba make it impossible to protect residents' health.

Asked about the temporary storage facility problem, Idogawa told the Mainichi, "Because the former administration was pressing forward with the issue in a hasty manner, I wanted to put my life on the line to block the move. The new administration is going to proceed with the issue while listening to dialogue," he said as one of the reasons for his resignation.

The mayor had clashed with the town assembly, which has been demanding the return of the town's office functions to Fukushima Prefecture. He was also criticized for being absent from meetings with the central government and the Fukushima Prefectural Government. But his confrontational stance against the central government garnered support in and outside Fukushima Prefecture.

After the town assembly passed a no-confidence motion against him for the third time in December last year, Idogawa dissolved the assembly. However, the upcoming town assembly election is likely to see eight former assembly members win by default. If the new assembly once again passes a no-confidence motion against him, he would have automatically lost his post.

According to the Futaba Municipal Government, Idogawa submitted a letter of resignation to the secretariat of the town assembly on Jan. 23. Under the Local Autonomy Law, he will lose his post in 20 days from that date.

At the relocated town office in Kazo, Idogawa announced his intention to resign before the assembled senior town officials at around 4:30 p.m. on Jan. 23.

"Although we are left in darkness at the moment, the time will come when things get brighter. I want the town office and residents to work together and find solutions," Idogawa told those in attendance, who all went quiet.

One town employee lamented about the mayor's sudden resignation, saying, "How come this could happen while everyone is doing their best? I wonder what will become of our town hereafter."

Idogawa denied he had any intention to run in the town's next mayoral election. He had been hospitalized in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki since Jan. 20 after "feeling heavy in the head," and had just left hospital on the morning of Jan. 23 before announcing his resignation.

Taeko Yokoyama, 58, a Futaba resident evacuated to a temporary housing unit in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Aizuwakamatsu, was lost for words upon hearing the news of the mayor's resignation. She has supported Idogawa's staunch opposition to the central government's plan to construct an interim storage facility for radioactive soil in Futaba.

"We town residents have been left without any explanations (about the storage facility). We are always forced to reluctantly concede. Is it right to mindlessly follow the central government? Mr. Idogawa was always on the side of town residents. I wanted him to hold out and continue," she said.

20,000 cherry trees for Fukushima

January 25, 2013

Group to plant cherry trees in Fukushima Pref.

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130124004455.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

A massive tree-planting project along about 160 kilometers of road in coastal areas of Fukushima Prefecture aims to construct the nation's most beautiful row of flowering cherry trees in the area devastated by the March, 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, as well as the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Led by members of Happy Road Net, a nonprofit organization, and others, the tree-planting festivities will kick off Saturday in Shinchi, the prefecture's northernmost town, with a goal of planting about 1,600 cherry trees this year.

The project envisions annual plantings that will take place from January to March, aiming to decorate 160 kilometers of road with about 20,000 cherry trees.

A call for volunteers and donations for the project--including the adoption of individual cherry trees--has been announced.

The tree-planting project had in fact been proposed by the organization's director, Yumiko Nishimoto, well before the disaster in March 2011. Due to the crisis at the Fukushima plant, however, Nishimoto and other members were forced to evacuate the town, and she had almost given up on the idea.

Later on, hoping to make the area a source of local pride for children decades into future, she decided to embark on the project thinking, "I'll make the nation's most beautiful row of cherry trees, which will serve as a symbol for reconstruction from the disaster."

The varieties of cherry trees to be planted include someiyoshino, weeping cherry trees and double-flowered cherry trees, purchased as saplings using a prefectural government subsidy.

Local middle and high school students will take part in Saturday's planting. The students will write messages on a board addressed to the community 30 years from now, and the boards will be attached to the saplings. The cherry trees are expected to blossom in four or five years, according to the organization.

About 100 saplings will be planted on Saturday along National Highway Route 6 near the Shinchi town government offices. After that, the organizing committee plans to plant cherry trees in the Onahama district of Iwaki, the Odaka district of Minami-Soma and Naraha, excluding areas where entry is restricted due to the situation at the nuclear plant.

The organization is also calling for the public to adopt individual cherry trees for a contribution of 10,000 yen as part of the establishment of a project fund. Contributions will be used for the purchase of saplings or the care and maintenance of the trees. Those who adopt a cherry tree will be provided a board on which to display their names and messages on the tree, according to Happy Road Net.

"I hope many people across the nation will learn about the project to prevent the memories of the disaster from fading away," Nishimoto said at a press conference earlier this week.

For the past five years, Happy Road Net has been engaged in cleanup activities such as collecting roadside litter with the aid of local high school students. The organization is headquartered in the town of Hirono in the prefecture.

Two ways of looking at the same numbers

January 28, 2013

No. of tourists to northeastern Japan remains 80% of pre-quake level

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130128p2g00m0dm059000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The number of tourists staying at hotels and inns in Japan's northeast, a region hit hard by the March 2011 massive earthquake and tsunami, in the first half of fiscal 2012 was at less than 80 percent of the level seen before the disaster, the Japan Tourism Agency said Monday.

Lingering concerns over the nuclear crisis at the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture, as well as a lack of sufficient accommodation in disaster-affected areas are behind

the slow recovery of visitors to the region, observers said, adding that sluggish tourism could further delay the region's recovery from the disaster.

The number of tourists who stayed at hotels and other lodging facilities in six prefectures in northeastern Japan -- Aomori, Akita, Yamagata, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima -- between April and September last year came to around 8,977,000, down 23.0 percent from the corresponding period in 2010 before the disaster occurred, the agency said.

The 2012 figure even marked a drop of 11 percent compared with the figure in the same period in 2011. The number of guests at hotels and other accommodation facilities across the nation last year fell after the quake as many people refrained from traveling amid a mood of voluntary restraint on leisure activities, but the fall narrowed to 4.2 percent in the April-September period compared with the same period in 2010.

The number of foreigners, mainly South Korean and Chinese, who visited Japan's northeastern Japan in the half-year period totaled about 39,000, down 74.9 percent from the pre-quake level.

Japan's largest travel agency JTB Corp. said the number of customers of its package tours to the northeast in the October-December period last year remained about 15 percent below the level in the same period 2010, although it was up 5 percent from 2011.

Yuji Ohashi, an official of the Development Bank of Japan's branch covering the northeastern Japan region, said, "The entire northeastern region needs to deepen cooperation to lure tourists through such measures as developing attractive tourist routes."

January 26, 2013

Number of foreign tourists almost back to pre-disaster levels

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201301260047>

By KIYOHIDE INADA/ Staff Writer

The number of foreign visitors to Japan soared in 2012, rebounding from the yearlong slump following the Great East Japan Earthquake and approaching the record set in 2010.

According to estimates released on Jan. 25 by the Japan National Tourism Organization, 8.37 million foreigners came to Japan last year for either business or pleasure. That represented a 34.6-percent increase over 2011, when natural disasters and the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant kept many foreigners away.

Although last year saw the second-highest number of visitors, it was still 2.8 percent below the record set in 2010.

The government had set a target of 9 million foreign visitors for 2012.

"Overall, there has been an almost total recovery from the effects of the disasters," an official said.

Although South Korea had the largest number of visitors to Japan, the figure was down 16.2 percent from 2010, due not only to concerns about the nuclear accident, but also to the won's weakness in relation to the yen. There was a slight improvement in December, when the visitor figure was only 1.3 percent below the 2010 level.

Visitors from China increased by 1.2 percent over 2010 for all of 2012. However, the cancellation of a large number of group tours following the central government's purchase of three of the Senkaku Islands in September led to a sharp drop in visitors. In December, there was a 13.4-percent decrease.

Meanwhile, airline deregulation in Taiwan led to a record number of visitors in 2012, as many came as individual travelers due to the large increase in number of flights. Visitors from Taiwan outnumbered those from China in 2012 for the first time in three years.

Strong economic growth in Southeast Asia also led to record numbers of visitors to Japan from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam in 2012.

Retreats for Fukushima children

January 28, 2013

NPO calls for institutionalized retreats for Fukushima children

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20130128p2a00m0na004000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Hiroyuki Yoshino of the civic group Fukushima Network for Saving Children from Radiation (Kodomo Fukushima) turned the pages of a photo album as he began to speak. The photos were taken last November of nursery school children from Fukushima on a visit to Yonezawa, Yamagata Prefecture, where they collected branches while exploring the woods.

"Children need an environment where they can breathe air that hasn't been tainted and play outside to their hearts' content," Yoshino said.

The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster that broke out in March 2011 released radioactive materials in the Nakadori region along the Abukuma River, which flows north through central Fukushima Prefecture. Outdoor activities were restricted for children in these areas, including in the cities of Fukushima and Koriyama. While progress has been made in decontamination work at schools, forests and shrubbery along routes taken by children to and from school have yet to be treated.

After graduating from university in Tokyo, Yoshino, a native of the Fukushima prefectural capital, got a job at a Tokyo-based company selling high-end import products. With growing questions about evaluating worth only through price, he quit the company after about five years. He subsequently spent two years traveling the world, and returned to Fukushima in 1997.

It was around that time that a concert by Ukrainian singer Nataliya Gudziy, who was exposed to radiation as a child in the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, was held in the prefectural city of Minamisoma. Yoshino learned what had happened to Gudziy and other children, and began fundraising activities for Chernobyl victims.

"I never thought a nuclear disaster would take place in Fukushima," Yoshino said.

Yoshino found a job in Fukushima and got married. In 2007, the couple had a daughter. His wife, originally from Tokyo, had finally grown accustomed to life in Fukushima when the nuclear disaster broke out. On March 20, 2011, his wife and daughter evacuated from the prefecture. Yoshino was let go by his employer because of plummeting sales, but has stayed in Fukushima, far away from his wife and daughter, who are now in Kyoto.

"I've been asked why I'm not living with my family. But there were children here who due to family issues or otherwise, were unable to evacuate and were living here in fear," Yoshino said, looking back. "I couldn't overlook that."

"Convalescence" efforts entail sending children and their guardians on weekend-long or long-term retreats to areas with lower radiation levels to reduce their exposure to radiation and allow them to experience a change of pace. Individuals and non-profit organizations nationwide have arranged to accept children from Fukushima on such visits. Over 5,000 children and family members have gone on retreats using networks established by Kodomo Fukushima and others.

There has been a ceaseless flow of applications for these retreats, and Yoshino says there's a limit to what the private sector can do.

"There's the financial aspect, but also, to allow more children a chance to participate in a fair manner, it would be ideal to set up something that takes the form of something like overnight school trips. To make that happen, the involvement of government is imperative."

Yoshino says he hopes such retreats will become institutionalized under the Act on the Protection and Support for the Children and other Victims of the TEPCO Disaster that was passed in the Diet last year.

"I'm so frustrated that we can't live our lives with peace of mind. But waiting won't get us anywhere," Yoshino said. "What's best for the children? As an adult victim, I want to do everything I can for them."

Sueing TEPCO

January 28, 2013

Over 500 Fukushima residents to file damage suit against gov't, TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130128p2a00m0na012000c.html>

More than 500 Fukushima Prefecture residents are poised to file a damage suit against the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, over health concerns and discrimination they suffered on the heels of the nuclear disaster.

The class action suit, to be filed mainly by residents of the city of Iwaki and other areas outside the nuclear evacuation zones, is the largest suit ever over the nuclear crisis in terms of the number of plaintiffs. They are set to file the case with the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court on March 11.

On Jan. 27, some 200 residents attended a ceremony in Iwaki marking the forming of the plaintiffs' group. In the lawsuit, the plaintiffs are demanding 250,000 yen each in damages for their mental distress over the one-month period following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March 2011, as well as 80,000 yen per month for children and pregnant women until the decommissioning of reactors at the troubled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is completed. Additional demands will be made for the actual expenses the plaintiffs had to pay for their evacuation. There were 512 residents who submitted their proxies to the plaintiffs' group as of Jan. 27.

Although there are many voluntary evacuees with small children and residents with health concerns in areas outside the evacuation zones, the amount of compensation they receive is smaller than that for residents within the evacuation zones. Thus far, compensation for voluntary evacuees who were under 18 or pregnant stood at 720,000 yen each across the board.

For inquiries, call Hiroshi Yoshida at the secretariat of the plaintiffs' group at: 080-1815-5089 (in Japanese).

"The recovery has just begun"

February 1, 2013

First debris removed from previous restricted area in Fukushima



Disaster debris is seen on Feb. 1 before it is carried to the storage site in the Odaka district of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130201p2a00m0na012000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- The Ministry of the Environment on Feb. 1 started the first removal of debris from a previous restricted area some 20 kilometers from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.

On the coast of the Odaka district, a restricted area until April last year because of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the ministry started removing debris caused by the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami.

Some 183,000 tons of debris was estimated to lie in restricted areas in the city of Minamisoma. The ministry plans to build five temporary storage sites in these areas by September this year. After half of a storage site in the district of Tsukahara was completed, the ministry started removing debris from the district's neighboring areas.

Since the national government lifted some restricted areas in Minamisoma last April, those residents who could return to their homes have asked for the early removal of the debris. However, **anxiety among residents about radiation persisted, preventing the building of temporary storage sites.** The residents are concerned about how the temporary storage sites use plastic sheets for the prevention of soil pollution by radioactive materials. The ministry will also carry out real-time measurements on the amount of radiation.

On Feb. 1, the staff worked on the debris, separating wood, metal and concrete with bulldozers. **These materials will be carried to the storage site and then separated into recyclables and non-recyclables. The combustibles will be burned at a temporary incinerator in the area.**

Head of the Tsukahara administrative district, 62-year-old Yoshiki Konno, watched the debris removal and commented, "**The recovery and reconstruction have just begun.** Not every resident supports the construction of the storage sites, but we are working with the hope of making a faster recovery."

Reconstruction Agency fails to implement the law

February 1, 2013

Editorial: Reconstruction Agency should do more to help Fukushima children

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2013/02/01/20130201p2a00m0na011000c/001.html>

The Reconstruction Agency has come under fire for failing to promptly draw up and implement measures to support children in areas suffering from the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under lawmaker-initiated legislation enacted more than half a year ago.

The law aimed at supporting the livelihoods of children and others affected by the nuclear disaster stipulates that the executive branch of the government must extend necessary assistance to victims who are worried about their health and forced to shoulder extra burden in their lives.

Specifically, the law requires the government to conduct health examinations of victims, exempt them from paying medical bills and pay special attention to children and expecting mothers who are particularly vulnerable to radiation. The law also stipulates that victims have the right to evacuate from their neighborhoods to avoid being exposed to radiation as well as the right to return home.

The law was submitted by bipartisan lawmakers and was unanimously passed in June last year following consultations between ruling and opposition parties.

However, the law does not provide for specific measures to support the livelihoods of children and other victims of the nuclear disaster. Instead, implementation of such measures is left to the discretion of the executive branch. Some legislators have expressed concern about the law's failure to mention specific assistance measures during Diet deliberations on the bill.

The Reconstruction Agency's failure to put the principles of the law into practice is attributable to its slow response. The law clearly states that the executive branch must set a basic policy of supporting nuclear disaster victims. Nevertheless, the agency has failed to do so although more than six months has passed since the law was approved.

Agency officials argue that the delay is because they must go back to the drawing board following the transfer of power from the Democratic Party of Japan to the Liberal Democratic Party. Still, its response is too slow.

The agency intends to incorporate the direction of measures to support victims and the expansion of areas covered by such measures in its basic policy. Unless the agency determines such basic plans, ministries concerned cannot draw up specific measures that require budget appropriations. The reconstruction minister, senior vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries who have been appointed from among legislators should play a leading role in working out basic policy as soon as possible.

Citizens' organizations have already made specific requests regarding the expansion of measures to support victims. One of these groups asks that Fukushima Prefecture as a whole be covered by the measures while another insists that such assistance be extended to all residents of areas where the annual radiation dosage exceeds 1 millisievert -- the upper limit on ordinary people's radiation exposure. The agency needs to reflect the opinions of residents of disaster-hit areas in reviewing the areas covered by such assistance.

There are reports that the amount of radiation children outside government-designated evacuation zones are exposed to has been growing. This is apparently because children now go outdoors more frequently than shortly after the nuclear disaster broke out. On the other hand, a survey conducted by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry shows that a growing number of children in areas hit by the nuclear disaster are gaining weight because they have refrained from playing outdoors.

The law also stipulates that children should be given an opportunity to experience activities in a natural environment outside Fukushima Prefecture during school vacations. Such programs have already been carried out using funds set aside specifically for these activities and with cooperation from the private sector. These activities should be drastically expanded. Priority should be placed on measures to support children affected by the disaster, including assistance to families with children who have evacuated from their neighborhoods affected by the disaster.

The role that the Diet should play is also important. Frustrated by the executive branch's slow response, legislators formed a nonpartisan parliamentary league last month to support children and other disaster

victims. The legislative branch should fulfill its role of monitoring the executive branch's implementation of policy measures.

February 01, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Revamping the Reconstruction Agency

February 5, 2013

Reconstruction Agency under reform a year on

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/06/national/reconstruction-agency-under-reform-a-year-on/#.URFf-L1tEs>

Plagued by administrative disorganization, the Reconstruction Agency is revamping itself to accelerate recovery from the March 2011 disasters, ahead of the first anniversary of its launch Sunday.

Designed to oversee the rebuilding of areas devastated by the massive earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident, the agency was expected to guide related government agencies. In reality, however, progress has been slow in housing reconstruction and decontamination of radiation-polluted areas.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has made postdisaster reconstruction a priority, along with economic revival, plans to improve coordination within the agency to better effect policies.

“The agency will be revamped drastically with the vertically divided administration eliminated,” Abe said.

As part of its organizational reform, the agency set up on Friday a head office in the city of Fukushima to supervise restoration efforts in areas affected by the triple-meltdown calamity at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

In the system envisioned by Abe, the agency in Tokyo and the Fukushima head office will serve as two major headquarters for reconstruction projects.

The Fukushima head office will “implement reconstruction measures promptly, with a hands-on approach,” according to postdisaster reconstruction minister Takumi Nemoto.

The new head office unifies the agency’s bureau for reconstruction in Fukushima Prefecture, the Environment Ministry’s office for Fukushima’s environmental regeneration and the government’s nuclear disaster response headquarters in the prefecture.

The reform is expected to promote on-the-spot decision-making on decontamination work and the return of evacuees.

The Reconstruction Agency is tasked with taking requests from disaster-hit local governments, mostly in the Tohoku region, including Fukushima Prefecture, distributing subsidies for them to use freely, and certifying special reconstruction zones for preferential tax treatment and deregulation measures to attract companies.

In the early stage of its launch last year, some municipalities criticized the agency’s overall attitude toward reconstruction. Futoshi Toba, mayor of the city of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, said he

“expected the agency to take the standpoint of disaster-hit areas to the extent that they will fight against other ministries. But, in fact, its officials have instead tried to persuade us to give up our requests.”

But in the course of a year, things seem to have slowly changed for the better. “The agency has come to aim for common goals with us,” Sendai Mayor Emiko Okuyama said.

Regional governments say the agency needs to revise the distribution of subsidies. Many criticize the agency’s glacial pace. An official of the town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture noted the timing of the distribution is out of sync with the town’s budget-forming schedule, causing inefficiencies.

The Abe government decided to boost the budget for reconstruction through fiscal 2015 by ¥6 trillion to ¥25 trillion.

Still, the disaster-hit areas face shortages of civil engineers, architects and city planners. Contractors undertaking reconstruction work are also understaffed

7.5 billion extra gov't dollars for compensation funds

February 5, 2013

TEPCO gets approval for \$7.5 billion more compensation funds

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302050025>

REUTERS

Fukushima nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Feb. 4 received approval to tap the Japanese government for \$7.5 billion more funds to compensate those harmed by the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

TEPCO issued a statement saying the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry had approved the utility's request to increase compensation by 697 billion yen (\$7.5 billion), or 22 percent, to 3.24 trillion yen.

The increase was requested because of changes to requirements for receiving compensation. About 160,000 people were evacuated from areas around the plant after an earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 caused reactor meltdowns and the worst radiological release since 1986. TEPCO has admitted it was insufficiently prepared for natural disasters.

Compensation funds do not include costs to decommission the four damaged reactor buildings inside the Fukushima No. 1 plant north of Tokyo.

TEPCO also said on Feb. 4 it had a 2.22 billion yen loss for the nine months through December and almost tripled its full-year loss forecast to 120 billion yen

TEPCO officials said in November the costs of compensation and decontamination may double to 10 trillion yen, making greater government support vital.

All but two of Japan's 50 reactors have been halted for maintenance and safety checks to see if they could withstand an earthquake and tsunami similar the March 2011 disaster.

(\$1 = 92.6100 Japanese yen)

Gov't to give more aid to TEPCO for compensation payments

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130205p2g00m0dm007000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government decided Monday to provide an additional 696.8 billion yen to Tokyo Electric Power Co. to help the utility pay its compensation liabilities stemming from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster.

The new aid brings to more than 3 trillion yen the total assistance paid to TEPCO over the disaster.

The decision was included in a revised version of the 10-year restructuring plan for TEPCO, initially authorized by the government in May last year to put the ailing company's business back on track while avoiding bankruptcy.

Apart from the funds provided from a state-backed bailout fund to ensure swift compensation payments, TEPCO has received a capital injection of 1 trillion yen in line with the restructuring plan, a move that has put the utility under de facto state control.

TEPCO needs massive funds not only to compensate people and companies affected by the nuclear disaster, triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, but also to scrap the Fukushima plant's crippled reactors and finance increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation.

TEPCO plans to eventually repay the funds it received for compensation purposes from the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund.

TEPCO also promised that it will accept compensation claims over the nuclear disaster beyond the three-year legal time limit for seeking damages.

TEPCO and lawsuits

February 10, 2013

Extension on N-disaster claims eyed

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130209003013.htm>

Outline of compensation process



The government has decided to submit a bill to create a special measures law that would enable nuclear disaster victims to demand compensation beyond the Civil Code's three-year statute of limitations.

A plan was made on Friday to submit the bill aimed at victims of the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant during the current Diet session.

Unable to keep up with the volume of applications for compensation-based settlements, the government hopes to provide victims with further relief through the special legislation.

The bill targets cases in which mediation by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center between TEPCO and disaster victims fails. The center is under the jurisdiction of the government's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Compensation of Nuclear Damage.

If the Civil Code's statute of limitations runs out before a settlement is reached in mediation, the special law is expected to allow victims to file lawsuits during an extension period.

The Civil Code stipulates that victims of accidents and unlawful actions have the right to demand compensation.

If victims have not exercised their rights within three years of suffering damage while others involved have petitioned the courts, the statute of limitations will go into effect and the rights will expire.

The statute of limitations is suspended if people involved file lawsuits within the three-year period.

But the rule has not been applied to mediations between the dispute resolution center and the nuclear disaster victims.

Thus it is expected that in cases related to the Fukushima disaster, there will be cases in which the statute of limitations will run out as early as March 2014.

TEPCO's comprehensive special business plan, which the government approved on Feb. 4, states that TEPCO does not believe that the expiration of the three-year period after the nuclear crisis will enable it to avail itself of the statute of limitations. The utility is seen to be flexibly responding to demands for compensation.

However, since the business plan itself does not nullify the statute of limitations, many victims of the nuclear disaster are worried that they may be unable to receive compensation under TEPCO's current management conditions.

Consequently, the government determined that a special measures law was needed to assure that the three-year statute of limitations would not be applied to the nuclear crisis.

The dispute resolution center was set up to ensure smooth proceedings in negotiations between the victims and TEPCO.

Responding to requests from victims, lawyers and examiners at the dispute resolution center have mediated between the two sides since September 2011.

As of the end of January this year, there were 5,063 requests for mediation services. Of them, 1,204 had reached settlements and 3,201 were still in progress.

There have been about 300 new requests per month, resulting in a backlog of administrative work. Some legal experts previously voiced concerns that the statute of limitations would run out during the mediation process.

February 9, 2013

Evacuee suits target Tepco, government

Refugees from Fukushima fed up with delayed compensation

by Mizuho Aoki
Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/09/national/evacuee-suits-target-tepco-government/#.URVwQvL1tEs>

Fukushima residents forced out of their homes by the nuclear crisis plan to file group damages suits against the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. on March 11, the second anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, their lawyers said Friday.

Around 10 households now living in Chiba Prefecture and about 10 families taking refuge in Tokyo are expected to file the suits in the Chiba and Tokyo district courts.

The lawyers said they believe these will be the first lawsuits targeting the central government for damages caused by the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Although the lawyers in Tokyo and Chiba haven't finalized the size of damages each plaintiff will seek, including compensation for mental duress, the total for some of the households could reach ¥100 million, said Masatada Akimoto, one of the attorneys for the Chiba group.

Meanwhile another group of Fukushima people now residing in Fukushima, Miyagi, Yamagata, Tochigi and Ibaraki prefectures are preparing to file group damage suits against the government and Tepco on March 11. That suit will be filed with the Fukushima District Court, lawyers in the city of Fukushima said Friday.

They said they will seek ¥50,000 for each plaintiff for every month they have been displaced. They also plan to demand that radiation levels in their hometowns be reduced to their precrisis levels. The number of plaintiffs is expected to be around 350.

"The government promoted nuclear power plants prioritizing the economy over safety. . . . We believe it is time to demand that Tepco and the government take responsibility (for the nuclear disaster)," Akimoto told The Japan Times.

"People who evacuated from Fukushima still have no idea about their future. Their frustration has surpassed the breaking point," he said.

According to Akimoto, Tepco has failed to reach damages settlements with people who fled from areas of Fukushima that were not designated for evacuation.

"As people begin to realize that Tepco is not willing to do anything (for them), some people have started to think that they need to stand up and do something about it rather than just wait," Akimoto said.

Although the number of plaintiffs is small at present, he believes similar lawsuits will follow this year, considering the thousands of people living in similar straits across Japan.

As of Jan. 17, a total of 57,377 evacuees from Fukushima were living outside the prefecture. Among them, 7,458 are in Tokyo, the metropolitan government said.

Never give up

February 11, 2013

Search for remains of disaster victims conducted in Iwate, Miyagi

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130211p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

SENDAI, Japan (Kyodo) -- Local police and coast guard conducted an intensive search Monday for traces of those whose remains have not been found since the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami disaster in the coastal areas of Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

"Families of the missing people cannot go undersea by themselves. We hope we can recover (their remains) or something that could identify them," said Nobuki Fujita, 38, who led a team of four divers who were involved in the search activities in Kesenuma, Miyagi.

Overall, 2,698 people remained unaccounted for as of Feb. 6 following the disaster, of whom 2,483 were from the two prefectures, according to the National Police Agency. The death toll stood at 15,880.

In Rikuzentakata, Iwate, some 90 officers from the local coast guard and fire headquarters observed a moment of silence in honor of the victims on the seashore before launching the search.

"Miracle" pine preserved - A symbol

Tsunami 'miracle' tree gets root and branch preservation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201302130007>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A lone pine tree that survived the 2011 tsunami when this city was all but swept away is on its way to becoming a permanent memorial after completion of expensive preservation work.

The sole conifer left standing at the renowned Takata Matsubara pine forest beauty spot came to be seen locally as a symbol of hope and fortitude.

It died because the ground was soaked with seawater, but local officials solicited donations to cover the estimated 150 million yen (\$1.6 million) needed to fell the tree, embalm it, and re-erect it.

But donations have not reached even half the target figure, so the local government is temporarily using contributions for reconstruction to cover the shortfall.

In September, the tree was cut down, divided into sections and dispatched to specialists elsewhere in Japan for preservation. In Aichi Prefecture, for example, experts hollowed out the trunk to inject synthetic resin into its central cavity.

On Feb. 12, an eight-meter section of lower trunk arrived back in Rikuzentakata duly fortified. Workers used a crane to hoist it into a prepared concrete base.

"I understand that the tree needs to be heavily preserved so that it will withstand the wind and rain," said Yoshihisa Suzuki, 68, the chairman of the Association for the Preservation of Takata Matsubara. "But seeing it artificially repaired like this gives me mixed feelings."

The project is scheduled to be completed in early March.

Restoration of 'miracle pine' reaches final stage

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130212p2g00m0dm041000c.html>

MORIOKA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Restoration of a "miracle pine" that survived the massive March 2011 tsunami in Rikuzentakata, northeastern Japan, reached the final stage Tuesday, with workers planting its eight-meter roots into the ground.

The trunk and branches will be assembled from later this month to complete the restoration of the 27-meter pine at its original site by March 11, the second anniversary of the disaster, according to the municipal government.

The tree in Iwate Prefecture was dissected last September into several parts for anti-decay treatment. The plant was the only one of about 70,000 pines on a stretch of coast to survive the disaster, but its roots were found to be dying from exposure to seawater, prompting efforts to preserve the tree, which has become a symbol of the city's reconstruction.

Step up reconstruction

February 15, 2013

Improve reconstruction efforts

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/02/15/editorials/improve-reconstruction-efforts/#.UR3qxvL1tEs>

One year has passed since the Reconstruction Agency was established (Feb. 10, 2012) to help accelerate the reconstruction of areas hit by the massive quake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. As of Jan. 17, a reported 316,353 disaster victims, including those affected by the catastrophe at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, still cannot return to their homes. Current efforts are clearly insufficient and must be stepped up.

Many disaster victims, especially those near the Fukushima nuclear power plant, are having trouble rebuilding their lives and planning their futures. Merely rebuilding infrastructure is not enough; the agency must take measures to stabilize the lives of these citizens, who have already suffered far too much. The Abe administration has increased the budget for 3/11-related reconstruction from the ¥19 trillion set by the Democratic Party of Japan government to ¥25 trillion, for a five-year period starting from fiscal 2011. The administration must take utmost care to prevent these funds from being used for purposes unrelated to reconstruction and disaster prevention in the areas affected by the 3/11 disasters.

In Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, major infrastructure and public services have been almost restored. Preparations for relocating residents to safer areas are being made for more than 80 percent of the planned areas. But local governments are suffering from shortages of civil servants capable of designing relocation projects and overseeing their execution. The Reconstruction Agency should dispatch civil servants to bolster the manpower at local governments and help them obtain the necessary construction materials and workers.

The government must pay serious attention to the rapid population outflow from disaster areas. Unless it is staunch, it will be meaningless to rebuild infrastructure. It is imperative that the Reconstruction Agency create employment opportunities in these areas so that local residents can remain.

Although most large enterprises in the affected areas have restarted business operations, only 60 to 70 percent of the fishing-related facilities and about 40 percent of the agricultural areas have been restored. Reconstruction projects have created new employment opportunities, but such jobs are expected to disappear once the projects are completed. Therefore the agency should help to quickly restore fishing-related facilities and agricultural land, and find enterprises that are willing to start businesses in disaster areas. To this end, the agency should increase subsidies for such companies.

On Feb. 1, the government established the Fukushima reconstruction and resuscitation headquarters with some 70 workers in Fukushima City by integrating the Fukushima Reconstruction Bureau to push infrastructure construction, the Fukushima environment resuscitation office to decontaminate areas contaminated with radioactive substances from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and the local

nuclear disaster countermeasure headquarters to review zoning of the no-man's land around the nuclear power plant.

The new bureau should quickly work out measures to lay the foundations for local people's future lives by carefully listening to their opinions with regard to critical issues such as the rebuilding of communities and the location of an interim facility for storing contaminated soil removed during the cleanup process.

Tohoku Electric: 11.4% raise

February 15, 2013

Tohoku Electric to seek 11.4% household power rate hike

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/15/business/tohoku-electric-to-seek-11-4-household-power-rate-hike/#.UR3qWfL1tEs>

Tohoku Electric Power Co. sought government approval Thursday to raise household electricity rates by an average of 11.41 percent from July 1 to offset its worsening business due to the shutdown of its atomic reactors due to the March 2011 megaquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters.

The utility, which supplies power to areas that include disaster-hit Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, said it also plans an average 17.74 percent rate hike for corporate users from July 1, a move that does not require government approval.

The firm said it has no plans to give special treatment to people and companies affected by the disasters in introducing the rate hikes, a move that may have an impact on ongoing reconstruction efforts in the disaster-devastated Tohoku region.

Tohoku Electric is the fourth regional utility to apply for government approval to raise household electricity rates since Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant suffered three reactor core meltdowns after the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and monster tsunami. The disaster effectively led to the shutdown of the nation's reactors, although two were restarted last summer at the Oi, Fukui Prefecture, atomic plant of Kansai Electric Power Co., which is among the four to hike rates.

Most of the 10 major utilities posted group net losses for the April-December period as they continued to face growing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for the loss of halted reactors.

Under Tohoku Electric's plan, a standard household using around 280 kwh per month would see its monthly bill rise by ¥540, or 8.08 percent, to ¥7,223. If household rates are raised, it would be the utility's first hike based on a thorough cost review in 33 years.

The utility came up with the rate hike plan by calculating the costs for supplying power during a three-year period from this April.

The plan is based on the assumption that Tohoku Electric's Higashidori nuclear plant in Aomori Prefecture will resume operations from July 2015 but its Onagawa plant in Miyagi Prefecture will remain idled in part because of the need to repair equipment damaged in the 3/11 natural disasters.

Kepeco and Kyushu Electric Power Co. have already applied for government permission for rate hikes, and their plans are being screened by the government.

Tepeco first sought to raise household rates by an average 10.28 percent but was asked to trim the increase to 8.46 percent based on a screening process.

Four electric utilities — Chubu, Hokuriku, Chugoku and Okinawa, do not plan to seek rate hikes at present because they are less dependent on nuclear power.

See also :

Utility covering disaster-hit region seeks power rate hike

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130215p2g00m0bu044000c.html>

New survey ship launched

February 16, 2013

Marine research ship for devastated Tohoku region launched

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201302160012>

By TAKASHI OKUMA/ Staff Writer

Carrying the hopes for a return to a rich and bountiful ocean, a new survey ship took to the sea on Feb. 15 to research what effect the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami had on the ecosystem off the Sanriku coast.

The launching ceremony was held at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd.'s Shimonoseki shipyard in Yamaguchi Prefecture, where the marine research vessel was christened the Shinsei Maru.

The ship slid into the sea, after elementary schoolgirl Natsumi Kawai cut the rope that held it.

The fifth-grader was invited from Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, a town that will become home to the new ship.

"I hope Sanriku will return to having a rich sea and recover (from the March 11, 2011, disaster)," the girl said.

Otsuchi Mayor Yutaka Ikarigawa added, "It brings hope to us in our devastated town."

To help the revival of fisheries in the waters off Sanriku, the University of Tokyo's Atmosphere and Ocean Research Institute and the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) have been surveying the seabed topography and other elements there.

The Shinsei Maru, the successor to the Tansei Maru, which was retired in January, was built at a cost of about 11 billion yen (\$120 million). The new 1,600-ton vessel is 2.5 times larger than the previous research vessel, and equipped with such tools as cutting-edge observational equipment and a **remote-controlled unmanned probe**.

Officials say they will conduct training with the ship from the summer to prepare for actual operations.

"This is the world's most-advanced research vessel," said Asahiko Taira, president of JAMSTEC, at the launch. "We will make good use of this to help the region's recovery."

Contaminated mushrooms and forests -The end of a way of life

February 17, 2013

Fukushima radiation threatens to wreak woodland havoc

by Winifred Bird

Special To The Japan Times

For Yuji Hoshino, mushrooms were a way of life. The 50-year-old farmer grew up watching his father raise shiitake mushrooms on their land at the foot of the mountains in Sanno, southern Tochigi Prefecture. Later, he became the one to yearly cut about 15,000 logs, each about a meter long and the diameter of a coffee saucer, from oak forests near his home. He would stud these logs with specially inoculated spore pegs and then stack them in forests and greenhouses for the crop to mature. Three to eight years later, hundreds of thousands of fleshy, white-and-brown mushrooms would be ready to pick.

The business had always been a family affair. His wife, Fumiko, was in charge of harvesting, his mother sold the organic fresh and dried mushrooms at a small specialty shop in central Sanno, and his father lent a hand all around. Hoshino's four children, three cats and four dogs used to hold down the rambling old farmhouse. When Hoshino drove into town, it was at the wheel of a gray van proudly emblazoned with the farm slogan: "Hoshino Mushroom Shop: The lively scent of the mountains."

But the ongoing disaster that began at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 1, 2011 has shattered Hoshino's mushroom-centered world.

Because of fallout from three reactor meltdowns there, he has not sold a single shiitake since last May, and now has to support his family with compensation payments from the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco).

"Log-grown mushrooms were a symbol of safe, chemical-free food. That's been turned upside down," said the stocky, self-assured farmer. "I can't sell my products with pride anymore."

Meanwhile, the future of the wild plants, animals, and insects in the coppiced oak woodlands where he used to cut logs for the shiitake crop are also threatened.

The same is true throughout northeastern Japan. Because mushrooms are more prone than other crops to absorb the radioactive cesium spread by the disaster, growers continue to suffer even in areas where other farmers have returned to business-as-usual. And because mushroom production is closely entwined with a certain type of forested habitat, troubles in the industry presage ecological as well as human impacts.

Hoshino's farm is about 180 km from the destroyed reactors. However, radiation levels are lower there than they are in some parts of Tokyo; even in Hoshino's own forests, they are now at near-background levels. But as he began testing dried shiitakes in the fall of 2011, he discovered some that exceeded the legal limit for contamination, which at the time was 500 becquerels per kg (Bq/kg).

In response, he stopped selling mushrooms harvested since the disaster; soon after, the government placed a prohibition on the sale of dried mushrooms from the town.

Although fresh shiitakes from Sanno could still be sold, Hoshino chose not to do so because he could not guarantee they were safe. Consequently, he shut down the family store last May and began disposing of 30,000 logs exposed to radioactive rain.

As the new reality had sunk in over the winter of 2011-12, Hoshino said that anger toward Tepco and the Japanese government overwhelmed him: His blood pressure skyrocketed and he could constantly feel his heart beating.

"Everything I've done up till now, it's all become no good. I can't collect wild vegetables and I can't sell my mushrooms. There are problems with the fish in the rivers and I have to worry about contamination levels in the wild game, too. That's what makes me the most angry," he said.

By the spring of 2012, he had thrown himself into preparing paperwork to submit to Tepco to receive compensation for the family's lost income. Unable to fit his business model into the forms the utility sent him, he spent months documenting his losses with thick binders of photographs, text and tables. So far, he has received three payments.

"This is really hard stuff for an individual farmer to do. But I have an eight-person family with three kids in university. I couldn't wait. I've got past the anger," he said.

The future of the family business remains unclear. In forests and villages near the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in present-day Ukraine, where explosions and fires almost 27 years ago caused a widespread release of radioactive fallout, "hot" mushrooms remain a symbol of persistent environmental contamination.

Satoshi Yoshida, a researcher at the National Institute of Radiological Sciences, says scientists still don't know exactly why or how mushrooms accumulate so much cesium. But one reason, he says, is that large amounts of the contaminant remain available to them in forest environments for many years.

Japanese shiitakes are grown on logs, or — more commonly these days — on blocks made of sawdust, corncobs or other farm by-products. Those grown on logs are particularly vulnerable to contamination: According to Forestry Agency tests, shiitakes can accumulate double the concentration of radiocesium of the wood they are grown on. (Rice, in contrast, usually has one-tenth or less the radiocesium concentration of the paddy soil it is grown in.)

Additionally, mushrooms can absorb contaminants from the air or rain if they're raised outdoors, as are most shiitakes grown for drying.

With new food-safety laws limiting contamination to 100 Bq/kg of mushrooms, logs are permitted to have just 50 Bq/kg — and that's led to a shortage of nearly 2 million logs, the Forestry Agency says. Meanwhile, contaminated mushrooms keep turning up even as sales of farmed or wild mushrooms, or both, are still banned in dozens of cities in 13 prefectures.

One result of the restrictions is that northeastern farmers are abandoning coppiced oak stands. These scrubby, open forests were customarily cut on a 10- to 20-year cycle to supply logs for growing shiitake mushrooms or making charcoal, then allowed to regenerate as new trunks sprouted from the bases of harvested trees.

"Coppicing is important to renew and change the forest structure," explained Tatsuhiro Ohkubo, a forest ecologist at Utsunomiya University in central Tochigi Prefecture. "When people clear-cut small patches, it causes a drastic change that opens up the area to grassland, with flora and fauna that prefer that habitat. The mosaic structure of the coppiced stands is very effective for maintaining biodiversity."

Traditionally, rural families maintained these stands by harvesting grasses and leaves to enrich their farm fields, firewood to warm their homes and plants to make food, medicine and household items. But by the mid-20th century, woodlands had lost most of their practical purpose.

As a result, some were cleared to make way for housing developments or single-species timber plantations. In other places, trees grew larger and underbrush thickened, creating stands similar to climax forests deeper in the mountains. Many of the species traditionally found in the coppice — from insectivorous Indian sundews to graceful dogtooth violets and Tokyo salamanders — joined the ranks of locally or nationally threatened species.

The shiitake mushroom industry has been a saving grace for some of these species. Booming just as other farmstead uses for mixed woodlands declined, it gave farmers a reason to continue managing a patch or two of coppice. That was especially true in Fukushima Prefecture, which before the disaster supplied about half of all the logs sold nationwide for growing shiitake.

Recently, however, demand for logs has fallen as more and more farmers switch to factory-made blocks. In addition, a virulent bacterial disease called Japanese oak wilt, that's spread by beetles, has also been creeping northward through Honshu, devastating many of the coppiced oak stands that remain.

"That was a threat before 3/11. Now we are facing a double threat," said Ohkubo, referring to the likelihood that many mushroom farmers will stop using logs from northeastern Japan, and many more forests will be abandoned due to the nuclear disaster.

For Hoshino, that appears to be the only option. Last year he harvested 7,000 logs from his property. Those that he sampled had low enough contamination levels to warrant a test crop — but even so, he scrubbed each one with a wire brush before planting. This year, he decided to use logs from southern Japan. "I want to be able to tell my customers they are getting something absolutely safe," he said.

The strategy may just save Hoshino's business, but not northeastern Japan's stands of coppiced oaks.

"The number of people growing shiitakes on logs was already falling drastically. Because of the nuclear accident, the cycle of going into the forest and using the trees is simply disappearing more quickly," he said.

With it, a way of life and a unique rural environment may disappear as well.

what to do with tsunami debris in the US?

GOs discuss tsunami debris on US Pacific coast

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130217_15.html

Non-governmental organizations from Japan and the United States met in Oregon on Saturday to discuss how to deal with drifting debris from the March 11th disaster that is likely to be washed ashore in North America.

An estimated 1.5 million tons of tsunami debris is floating in the Pacific Ocean. A large amount is expected to reach the Pacific coast of North America.

The 7 members of the Japanese government's investigation team met local NGOs and state officials in Oregon on Saturday.

Members of an Oregon NGO said people are getting worried about the large amount of debris that is expected to reach the state's shores.

They proposed using social media to quickly share information among the parties concerned in Japan and the United States.

A Japanese NGO, "KIDSNOW", is working in Miyagi Prefecture. The head of the organization asked for items that can be identified to be returned to the owners, as they will have special meaning for those who suffered from the tsunami.

NGOs from both countries will study how the recommendations of the meeting can be put into practice.

TEPCO's latest lawsuit

February 18, 2013

Filipino to sue TEPCO over suicide of husband in Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201302180007

By YOSHIKA UEMATSU/ Staff Writer

SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture—Vanessa Kanno started sobbing when she looked at the messages scrawled in chalk by the man who had provided her with a quiet but happy life.

“I was a father who could do nothing,” one of the messages said.

Vanessa’s husband, Shigekiyo Kanno, a 54-year-old dairy farmer, wrote those words on the wall of a compost shed before hanging himself three months after the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011.

“I lived with him for more than 10 years,” Vanessa, 34, recently told The Asahi Shimbun on the farm. “I want to see him. He is not responsible, so why does he have to say, ‘I’m sorry?’”

Vanessa, who was born in the Philippines, and her two sons plan to file a lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court in March against the company she says is responsible for destroying the family’s peaceful life. They will demand about 110 million yen (\$1.2 million) in compensation from the nuclear plant’s operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Vanessa wed Kanno in 2000 after meeting him in the Philippines for an arranged marriage. At the farm in the mountainous village of Soma, the couple raised about 40 dairy cows and sold compost.

Kanno, described by neighbors as a quiet, earnest and hard-working man, always put top priority on his family. On holidays, the couple often went shopping or collected edible wild vegetables in the mountains with their two sons, now 7 and 8.

Vanessa, who helped to tend the cattle, said she was happy with this life.

About two months before the nuclear accident, Kanno took out loans of more than 5 million yen to build the compost shed, acting on his long-held desire to expand the scale of the farm that he had inherited from his father.

But the family’s life fell apart after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused a triple meltdown at the nuclear plant about 50 kilometers from the farm.

Amid rising fears of radiation contamination, Kanno was forced to suspend milk shipments for a month. He also faced difficulties selling his compost.

With no income coming in, the exasperated farmer was unable to pay off his debts.

“What should I do?” he repeatedly said.

Urged by the Philippine government, Vanessa temporarily returned to her homeland with her two sons in mid-April 2011.

A lonely Kanno considered giving up his farm and migrating to the Philippines. He spent a week in the country from late April, but he returned to Japan after struggling with the language and failing to find a job.

He talked with Vanessa two or three times a week through international phone calls. So desperate was their situation that they asked about things they used to take for granted, such as: “Did you eat dinner?”

On June 10, 2011, Vanessa was surprised to receive a call from her husband so early in the morning. His voice was normal, but his words were disturbing.

“Vane-chan (nickname of Vanessa), take care of our children firmly. You don’t have to come back (to Japan). Cherish them,” he told her.

The next morning, an agricultural cooperative worker found Kanno dead in the compost shed.

One message written on the wall said, “I have lost my vigor to do my job.”

Another message said, “If only there hadn’t been a nuclear power plant.”

Vanessa learned of her husband’s suicide through an e-mail sent from a friend. She immediately returned to Japan with her sons and held a funeral, all the time asking, “Why?”

Fearing radiation, she rented a house in the neighboring city of Date, about 20 kilometers from the farm. She says she cannot work because she has to take care of her child who often becomes sick.

Using part of the benefits from her husband's life insurance policy, she paid about 8 million yen to clear his debts and is now living off the remainder.

In November 2012, Vanessa met movie director Hiroshi Shinomiya, who was shooting a film about the situation in Fukushima Prefecture.

For the first time, she told the director about her desire to sue TEPCO for what had happened to the family.

"Our life is difficult. I want to fight for my children," she said.

In the lawsuit, Vanessa plans to argue that the effects of the nuclear accident made it impossible for the family to continue dairy farming and, as a result, the life of her family was destroyed and her husband committed suicide.

"We apologize from our heart that we have given troubles and anxieties to many people," TEPCO's public relations office said. "As for the planned lawsuit, we have yet to hear about it."

A sad story

February 19, 2013

Nuclear evacuee dies alone at temporary housing unit in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130219p2a00m0na009000c.html>

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima -- A man in his 50s who was living alone in a temporary housing unit here due to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster was found to have died from illness.

The man -- a former nuclear plant worker who was evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie -- was found dead at his temporary housing unit in the prefectural city of Nihonmatsu, it was learned on Feb. 19. A person from the neighborhood association found his body apparently shortly after he died on Feb. 16.

As the prevention of solitary deaths among disaster evacuees has become a major task for disaster-hit areas, the man's death came as a "shock because we have paid attention to evacuees living alone," said an official with the Namie Municipal Government.

According to the municipal government and other sources, a person on patrol from the temporary housing residents' association visited the man's home at around 9:15 a.m. on Feb. 16. Because there was no answer, the person unlocked the door using a crow bar and entered the home, where the man was

found dead on a futon. He is presumed to have died at around 8 a.m. that day, possibly from cardiac infarction.

The man used to often participate in gatherings at the temporary housing complex but had recently tended to stay indoors, prompting the neighborhood association to visit him frequently and pay close attention to him.

One in three households at the approximately 240-unit temporary housing complex is single households. The Namie Municipal Government will step up measures to prevent solitary deaths by strengthening patrols and contact systems for evacuees living alone, as well as expanding the age bracket of those subject to an emergency report system from the current age group of 65 years or older in principle.

Wasurenai Fukushima

February 19, 2013

Documentary examines ordeal of nuclear evacuees

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201302190001

By YOSHIKA UEMATSU/ Staff Writer

An upcoming documentary film depicts the ongoing burden for evacuees from a village situated close to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

"Wasurenai Fukushima" (We'll never forget Fukushima) profiles the residents of the village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, which was evacuated in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

"I couldn't return even if I wanted to, until I could grow rice and vegetables like before," said one woman interviewed.

The film will premiere March 2 at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography Hall in Meguro Ward. It will then play to audiences in Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya and elsewhere.

The movie's director, 54-year-old Hiroshi Shinomiya, is a native of Sendai who now lives with his family in Tokyo. When the quake and tsunami struck, he dropped the film he was working on at the time and set off from the capital, arriving in his hometown in late March. From there he went to Iwate, followed by Miyagi and Fukushima, filming the destruction wrought by the tsunami.

At first he thought the movie would focus on the tsunami.

But in April, Shinomiya learned that the entire village of Iitate, 40 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, had been ordered to evacuate on account of the airborne contamination falling there.

He recalls the eerie sight of a deserted farming village, which were it not for the lack of life, might otherwise have been Japan's most beautiful village.

"Whatever became of the people who left?" he wondered.

Shinomiya spent the next four months in Fukushima Prefecture, meeting evacuees and documenting their lives. He then returned to Tokyo, but kept visiting the region through 2012, equipped as always with his camera.

One of the people he met was a construction worker who lives with his Filipino wife, their three children and his mother. Before the evacuation, the six had been leading a halfway self-sufficient lifestyle in the mountains.

Then everything changed. His mother's health declined in the cramped temporary housing in an unfamiliar area; his weary wife said she wanted to return to the Philippines.

Radioactive contamination meant forestry, agriculture and dairy farming are now restricted in Iitate. And residents deprived of income are living in limbo.

And yet, until the very last minute, life in the village continued as normal: even as preparations were under way for evacuation, children continued to play outside.

When the disaster struck, Shinomiya too became a migrant. He, his wife and three children fled Tokyo for Okayama Prefecture for about five days, fearing that radiation would reach the nation's capital.

"We thought we should evacuate simply because we didn't know what the outcome would be," he said.

Now the fields around Iitate are reportedly overgrown with weeds and the village has an air of dereliction.

"We must not forget the fact that evacuees have been robbed of their beautiful, rich lives," said Shinomiya. "I hope people will watch the film, think about this, and do what they can to help."

The State has its responsibility too

February 18, 2013

Plaintiffs add state to defendants in fight against Hamaoka nuke plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130218p2a00m0na014000c.html>

SHIZUOKA -- An additional 155 people filed suit against the state as well as Chubu Electric Power Co. on Feb. 18, urging them to decommission the reactors at the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant in Omaezaki, Shizuoka Prefecture.

"The state has a legal responsibility to stop the dangerous nuclear power plant," they said in the suit filed with the Shizuoka District Court's Hamamatsu branch, bringing the total number of plaintiffs in the case to 336.

It is the first time in the Hamaoka legal battle to add the central government to the list of defendants. The government asked Chubu Electric in May 2011 to suspend operations of all reactors at the Hamaoka plant until the plant operator takes proper countermeasures.

According to the lawsuit, the plaintiffs who mainly live around the nuclear power plant expressed concern that a huge earthquake may trigger a severe accident because the nuclear complex stands on the assumed focal area of a possible deadly quake in the Tokai region. The lawsuit says the state should not allow Chubu Electric to restart the reactors, citing principles guaranteed under the Constitution such as "the right to live in peace, free from fear and want," and an article which states that the people's "right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness shall ... be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs."

The secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority declined to comment on the latest suit.

Michitoyo Hiratsuka, 52, of Shizuoka's Shimizu Ward, who joined the latest suit, the fifth in a series, said green tea farmers in the city of Shizuoka are still suffering from harmful rumors due to the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. If an accident occurs at the Hamaoka plant, the whole region will be beyond repair, he warned.

Concrete prices soar

February 19, 2013

Rising concrete prices hamper recovery in Tohoku disaster areas

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201302190059>
THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Soaring prices of construction materials have scared off contractors and are stalling projects in the areas of northeastern Japan that were devastated by the March 2011 quake and tsunami. Fewer companies are bidding for public works projects in the Tohoku region. And those that do bid often submit prices beyond the budgetary ranges of the local governments.

The Miyagi prefectural government failed to find contractors in 32 percent of bids for public works projects from spring to December 2012, a rate 10 times higher than before the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The figure for Iwate prefectural government projects was 14 percent, a nearly fivefold increase.

The city of Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, could not even find a company to rebuild a fire station damaged by the tsunami after twice calling for bids.

The project will probably not be completed until spring 2014, a year later than the city had expected. Firefighters have been forced to work out of temporary prefabricated buildings.

In Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, two rounds of bids since the end of last year failed to determine a contractor for repairing a road in a coastal district.

“Nothing has changed,” said a 77-year-old fisherman living in nearby temporary housing.

Senior officials of construction companies in the Tohoku region say they are afraid to submit bids because the huge demand in Tohoku has pushed up the prices of construction materials, particularly for ready-mixed concrete used in buildings and roads.

The prices have risen in 29 of 42 districts in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures, mainly coastal areas damaged by the tsunami, since February 2011, according to the Construction Research Institute.

In Sendai, ready-mixed concrete sold for 11,550 yen (\$123) per cubic meter in February, 43 percent higher than pre-quake levels and marking the largest increase in all districts.

Fresh concrete is produced by mixing water, cement, sand and crushed stone. The prices of sand and crushed stone have also skyrocketed.

According to a national industry association, shipments of ready-mixed concrete in the three prefectures rose by 80 percent during the nine months through December, compared with the same period the previous year.

In addition, 64 percent of construction companies in the disaster areas say they are short of workers, according to construction industry figures.

Fresh concrete must arrive at construction sites within about 90 minutes after being mixed at concrete plants.

In the Kesennuma area of Miyagi Prefecture, an industry cooperative plans to spend 800 million yen to add two plants to the existing four as early as this spring. But the six plants would supply only one-third of the volume required in the area.

Producers are reluctant to make substantial investments to match the rise in demand in the Kesennuma area because it is expected to fall back to pre-quake levels in fiscal 2016.

The government plans to spend more than 10 trillion yen on public works projects under the fiscal 2012 supplementary budget and the fiscal 2013 budget to shore up the nation’s economy.

If contractors compete to secure construction materials and laborers across the nation, thereby fueling the rise in prices, recovery of the disaster areas could be further delayed.

In December, the price of ready-mixed concrete rose 200 yen to 12,500 yen in 17 of Tokyo’s 23 wards, although it had previously remained flat.

“We are worried that the procurement of materials from outside the disaster areas will stall,” a fresh concrete industry official in Sendai said.

**See also this article dating from last July:
Concrete shortage delays reconstruction**

July 20, 2012

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120719004751.htm>

A serious shortage of ready-mixed concrete in areas hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake has been causing delays in reconstruction work.

While high demand for ready-mixed concrete for constructing dikes, rebuilding houses and other construction projects has contributed to the shortage, the problem has been exacerbated by difficulties in storing and transporting the material. Because concrete becomes hard in a short period of time, it is difficult to make in advance, store or produce in distant locations.

As concrete production cannot keep up with demand, some disaster-hit areas have experienced delays in reconstruction work. Some have voiced concerns that if no solutions are put forward, reconstruction may come to a complete halt.

Earlier this month at the Taro fishing port in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, about 10 kilometers north of the city's center, a 47-year-old construction company employee overseeing reconstruction work there said, "When will the concrete be delivered?"

While ready-mixed concrete is necessary for bank protection work and building tetrapods, which protect coastlines, they could not procure the material despite making many requests. In late June, the company received 30 cubic meters of ready-mixed concrete--less than half the quantity it had ordered--a week behind schedule.

"I'm sure we won't be able to finish construction by the scheduled completion date at the end of October. I can't even picture when work might be completed," the employee said.

The delay in rebuilding the port has caused trouble for local fishermen. "Because of land subsidence triggered by last year's disaster, the port is easily inundated by spring tides, among other things. Under these circumstances, we can't leave the port to fish. How long will we have to wait [until reconstruction is finished]?" a 70-year-old local fisherman said angrily.

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New plants hard to build

A cooperative association of ready-mixed concrete wholesale dealers in the Miyako area estimates that demand for the material in Miyako and Yamada, also in Iwate Prefecture, will be about 400,000 cubic meters this fiscal year, seven times more than usual.

However, the three plants in the area are only capable of producing about 150,000 cubic meters. Even if a floating concrete mixing-plant were built to produce the material at sea, it would only produce an extra 120,000 cubic meters. According to the prefecture's Ready-Mixed Concrete Industrial Association, it is difficult to build new plants because large plots of land are already being used for disaster debris disposal.

Ready-mixed concrete is made by mixing water, gravel and cement. If the material is already drying when it is cast into a mold, its strength could be reduced. For that reason, the Japan Industrial Standards stipulate that ready-mixed concrete should be delivered to construction sites within 90 minutes of being produced.

As a result, while iron frames and other construction materials can be manufactured in advance and stored until needed, it is impossible to do so for ready-mixed concrete. This poses a problem for producing concrete in the prefecture's inland areas, which suffered less damage, as it takes about two hours to transport the material to heavily damaged coastal areas.

In Miyagi Prefecture, demand for ready-mixed concrete for next fiscal year is estimated at about 4.7 million cubic meters, while actual supplies are expected to reach only 4.2 million cubic meters.

To address the situation, the Miyagi prefectural government and private organizations have jointly established a liaison council. The council conducted a survey to identify when and which areas are likely to face concrete shortages and is now considering asking neighboring regions to help supply those areas. In the prefecture, most reconstruction work is still in the initial stages and full-scale construction is slated to begin in autumn--a situation that is expected to further exacerbate concrete shortages. In Sendai, the city's Tozai subway line is scheduled to begin operations in fiscal 2015. Construction work on the subway line is expected to intensify soon, and will likely spur a concrete shortage. According to a cooperative association of ready-mixed concrete producers in Sendai, gravel is also scarce. As gravel is an essential ingredient in making ready-mixed concrete, that limits how much production can be increased. "While it's common sense that we should speed up reconstruction efforts, it's problematic that central, prefectural and municipal governments are simultaneously ordering construction projects. It's necessary to prioritize where and how to use a limited amount of materials," an association official said.

The price of electricity

February 21, 2013

Govt fights to curb rate hikes / Shikoku Electric follows other utilities in applying to raise fees

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/T130220005172.htm>

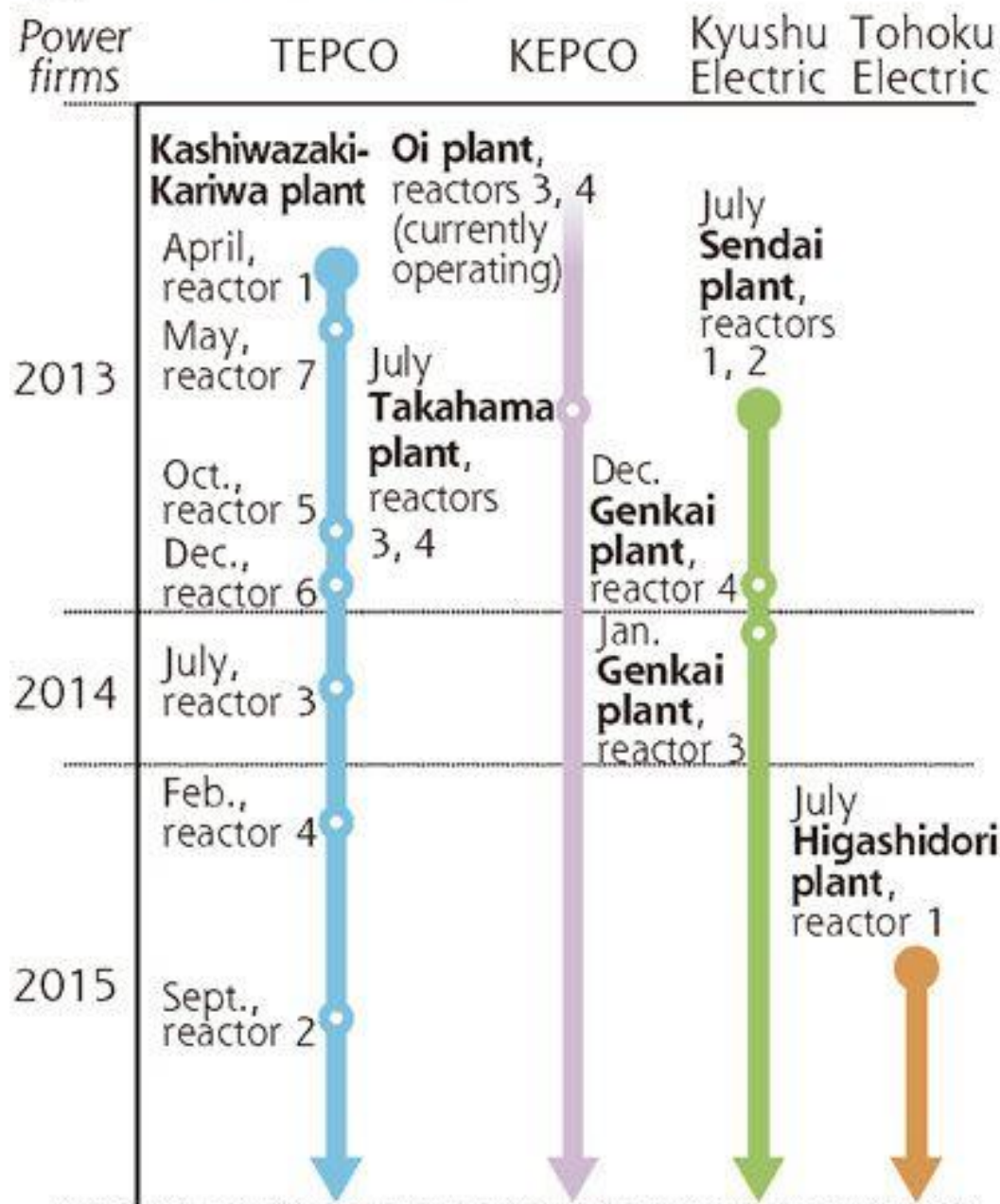
Tadaaki Inoue and Hiroyuki Tanaka / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

Average household electricity rate hikes

2012	September	Tokyo Electric Power Co. increases rates 8.46%
	November	Kansai Electric and Kyushu Electric apply for 11.88% and 8.51% hikes, respectively
2013	February 14	Tohoku Electric Power Co. applies for 11.41% hike
	February 20	Shikoku Electric Power Co. applies for 10.94% hike
	From March 1	Government to start screening requests by Tohoku and Shikoku utilities
	By late March	Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to decide whether to increase rates
	April 1	Kansai and Kyushu utilities to increase rates
	July 1	Tohoku and Shikoku utilities to increase rates

*Schedule from March 1 includes envisioned plans

Schedule to restart reactors at nuclear plants run by 4 firms that have raised rates or asked government for approval to do so



**Chart does not include schedules for regular inspections of reactors after they resume operation.*

As more utility companies across the nation have applied to the government for approval to increase electricity charges for households, consumers are likely to face further burdens. However, the government has yet to formulate measures to curb the rate hikes.

On Wednesday, Shikoku Electric Power Co. asked the government for approval, following similar steps taken by Kansai, Kyushu and Tohoku electric power companies.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. already raised its rate last year, while Hokkaido Electric Power Co. is mulling a price hike.

If the six utility firms raise rates, household users and company-based large-lot users are expected to face increased burdens of about 600 billion yen and 960 billion yen a year, respectively, resulting in economic hardship.

Currently many nuclear power plants in the nation are idled, leading the power companies to incur more fuel costs, which may further contribute to a price hike.

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Personnel costs key

On Wednesday, the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry's expert panel to examine electricity rates held its eighth meeting to discuss requests by KEPCO and Kyuden to increase rates from April.

The screening process of the requests by the rate examination panel, headed by Chuo University's Chuo Law School Prof. Junji Annen, is in the final stage.

At a press conference after Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi expressed his intention to compile measures to curb the rate hikes.

"Based on the conclusion [by the panel], I'd like to come up with measures [to deal with their requests]," the minister said.

The salaries of the utility firms' employees are included in the initial costs of power rate payment, so the monetary value of the labor is one of the most important aspects in the screening of the companies' rate hike requests.

KEPCO cut the average annual income of its employees by 16 percent to 6.64 million yen from the current 7.9 million yen to apply for the rate hike. Similarly, Kyuden also reduced the average annual income of its employees by 21 percent to 6.5 million yen from the current 8.26 million yen.

Past presidents of power companies often tend to assume advisory posts, and their salaries were also included as necessary expenses.

In the debate at the panel's meetings, the experts raised concern about the practice.

However, in the cases of both KEPCO and Kyuden, personnel costs account for only about 1 percent of overall costs.

In reality, the reduction of managerial salaries has a limited effect on scaling down the margin of rate hikes.

The major focus in the screening of rate hike calculations will be the extent to which the government would approve the ratio of fuel costs, which account for 30 percent of overall costs.

The panel is expected to urge the companies to work harder to reduce fuel procurement costs.

However, as fuel costs are fixed under relatively long-term contracts in many cases, a ministry official pointed out the difficulty in drastically reducing the margin of the rate hike.

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60 bil. yen increase to hit families

According to an estimate compiled by Koya Miyamae, economist at SMBC Nikko Securities Inc., households will see an increase in their electricity rates of about 600 billion yen in the period of a year,

while businesses will suffer a 960 billion yen increase in the same period in the service areas of the six utilities, including TEPCO, KEPCO and Kyuden, along with those of Tohoku Electric and Shikoku Electric, which planned to raise their rates in July, and of Hokkaido Electric, which will consider whether to raise its rate by the end of the fiscal year.

However, the rates may be further hiked, as the four utilities that have already increased rates or applied for the approval to do so, predicated their plans on the assumption that idled nuclear power plants would resume operation, a prospect which is now in doubt.

TEPCO planned to restart operations at the No. 1 reactor of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture in April. However, as the Nuclear Regulation Authority is to compile new safety standards for nuclear plants in July, realization of an April resumption has become impossible.

A restart of KEPCO and Kyuden's reactors in July is likewise doubtful.

If the reactor restarts are greatly delayed, fuel costs for substitute thermal power generation would increase, making the prospect of a rate hike by utilities more real.

Chubu Electric Power Co., Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Hokuriku Electric Power Co. said they did not intend to raise their rates at the moment. However, Chugoku Electric President Tomohide Karita said, "We would be forced [to raise the rate] if the reactors are not able to be restarted within fiscal 2013."

"The nuclear disaster took my future away"

February 22, 2013

Suicide prompts wife to sue Tepco

by Masami Ito

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/22/national/suicide-prompts-wife-to-sue-tepco/#.USaZYjf1tEs>

The last words that a Fukushima dairy farmer said to his wife in the Philippines over the phone on the morning of June 10, 2011, was to make sure that she and their children ate well, stayed healthy and didn't return to Japan.

Later that day, he hanged himself at his farm in Soma. His Filipino wife, Vanessa Abordo Kanno, and their two sons had fled to the Philippines after the nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant. Shigekiyo Kanno had remained to look after the farm.

More than a year and a half after her husband's suicide, Kanno, 34, is ready to stand up against Tokyo Electric Power Co. and is preparing to sue it for ¥110 million in damages over his death.

During a news conference Wednesday in Tokyo, Kanno broke down in tears as she explained that she harbored no anger toward Tepco because she feels the nuclear crisis was an "accident," adding she just wants the utility to financially assist her children.

"The future of my kids has been lost because of that nuclear power plant . . . I am not doing this for myself. All of my energy, I will give for the sake of my two kids," Kanno said.

Kanno and her husband had lived on his farm in Soma, where they owned about 40 cows. But 10 days after three of the No. 1 plant's reactors suffered core meltdowns after the March 11, 2011 disasters, the government ordered a monthlong suspension of milk shipments amid domestic and international alarms about radioactive contamination.

At the recommendation of the Philippine government, Kanno evacuated to her home country with her two sons for a spell from that April, as high levels of radiation had been detected around their district in Fukushima.

Shigekiyo Kanno visited them for about a week at the end of April and hinted he was going to give up dairy farming and look for a new job.

But money was a source of worry because he had just borrowed ¥5 million to build a new compost shed. Instead of finding a new occupation, he ended up taking his own life, hanging himself in the newly built shed. On the wall, he wrote a final message to his family in chalk, apologizing and repeatedly lamenting the existence of nuclear power: "If only there were no nuclear reactors . . . I have lost the will to work . . . I am sorry for being a father who was unable to do anything for you."

According to Kanno's lawyer, Yukuo Yasuda, she and her children were not deemed eligible to receive compensation from Tepco because they did not live in the government-designated evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 plant. But Yasuda explained that the suicide had clearly resulted from the nuclear catastrophe, and that Tepco should therefore be held responsible.

February 21, 2013

Family of Fukushima farmer who took own life to file damages suit against TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130221p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The bereaved family of a dairy farmer who killed himself after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster that broke out in March 2011 is set to file a suit against plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) for causing his suicide, the farmer's wife announced at a news conference on Feb. 20.

Vanessa, a 34-year-old Filipino national and wife of Shigekiyo Kanno, 54 at the time, who killed himself after the Fukushima nuclear plant meltdowns, is set to sue TEPCO at the Tokyo District Court as early as

mid-March, demanding some 110 million yen in damages. Vanessa claims that her husband killed himself because he was no longer able to run his dairy farm due to the nuclear disaster. She told reporters at the news conference with her two sons aged 8 and 6, "I will fight for my children's future."

Shigekiyo was found hanged in a compost shed on his farm in June 2011, three months after the Great East Japan Earthquake. There was a note written in chalk on the shed wall that read, "If only there were no nuclear plants," and "I lost my will to work." After the nuclear plant disaster, the shipment of pre-processed raw milk was suspended and he had to put down 36 milk cows.

After receiving an advisory from the Philippine government following the quake, Vanessa returned to the Philippines with her sons. She was informed of her husband's death in an email from an acquaintance. She was encouraged to think about suing TEPCO after Hiroshi Shinomiya, a 54-year-old film director, interviewed her for a documentary movie about Fukushima in November last year.

"I still miss my husband. The nuclear disaster took my future away," Vanessa said as she wept during the conference.

Yukio Yasuda, an attorney representing the plaintiff, said "Shigekiyo felt hopeless about the future of his business and his family had been torn apart because of the nuclear disaster. Such immense suffering caused the suicide and TEPCO should be held accountable for his death."

February 18, 2013

Filipino to sue TEPCO over suicide of husband in Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201302180007

By YOSHIKA UEMATSU/ Staff Writer

SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture—Vanessa Kanno started sobbing when she looked at the messages scrawled in chalk by the man who had provided her with a quiet but happy life.

"I was a father who could do nothing," one of the messages said.

Vanessa's husband, Shigekiyo Kanno, a 54-year-old dairy farmer, wrote those words on the wall of a compost shed before hanging himself three months after the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011.

"I lived with him for more than 10 years," Vanessa, 34, recently told The Asahi Shimbun on the farm. "I want to see him. He is not responsible, so why does he have to say, 'I'm sorry?'"

Vanessa, who was born in the Philippines, and her two sons plan to file a lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court in March against the company she says is responsible for destroying the family's peaceful life. They will demand about 110 million yen (\$1.2 million) in compensation from the nuclear plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Vanessa wed Kanno in 2000 after meeting him in the Philippines for an arranged marriage. At the farm in the mountainous village of Soma, the couple raised about 40 dairy cows and sold compost.

Kanno, described by neighbors as a quiet, earnest and hard-working man, always put top priority on his family. On holidays, the couple often went shopping or collected edible wild vegetables in the mountains with their two sons, now 7 and 8.

Vanessa, who helped to tend the cattle, said she was happy with this life.

About two months before the nuclear accident, Kanno took out loans of more than 5 million yen to build the compost shed, acting on his long-held desire to expand the scale of the farm that he had inherited from his father.

But the family's life fell apart after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused a triple meltdown at the nuclear plant about 50 kilometers from the farm.

Amid rising fears of radiation contamination, Kanno was forced to suspend milk shipments for a month. He also faced difficulties selling his compost.

With no income coming in, the exasperated farmer was unable to pay off his debts.

"What should I do?" he repeatedly said.

Urged by the Philippine government, Vanessa temporarily returned to her homeland with her two sons in mid-April 2011.

A lonely Kanno considered giving up his farm and migrating to the Philippines. He spent a week in the country from late April, but he returned to Japan after struggling with the language and failing to find a job.

He talked with Vanessa two or three times a week through international phone calls. So desperate was their situation that they asked about things they used to take for granted, such as: "Did you eat dinner?"

On June 10, 2011, Vanessa was surprised to receive a call from her husband so early in the morning. His voice was normal, but his words were disturbing.

"Vane-chan (nickname of Vanessa), take care of our children firmly. You don't have to come back (to Japan). Cherish them," he told her.

The next morning, an agricultural cooperative worker found Kanno dead in the compost shed.

One message written on the wall said, "I have lost my vigor to do my job."

Another message said, "If only there hadn't been a nuclear power plant."

Vanessa learned of her husband's suicide through an e-mail sent from a friend. She immediately returned to Japan with her sons and held a funeral, all the time asking, "Why?"

Fearing radiation, she rented a house in the neighboring city of Date, about 20 kilometers from the farm. She says she cannot work because she has to take care of her child who often becomes sick.

Using part of the benefits from her husband's life insurance policy, she paid about 8 million yen to clear his debts and is now living off the remainder.

In November 2012, Vanessa met movie director Hiroshi Shinomiya, who was shooting a film about the situation in Fukushima Prefecture.

For the first time, she told the director about her desire to sue TEPCO for what had happened to the family.

"Our life is difficult. I want to fight for my children," she said.

In the lawsuit, Vanessa plans to argue that the effects of the nuclear accident made it impossible for the family to continue dairy farming and, as a result, the life of her family was destroyed and her husband committed suicide.

"We apologize from our heart that we have given troubles and anxieties to many people," TEPCO's public relations office said. "As for the planned lawsuit, we have yet to hear about it."

More problems for TEPCO

February 22, 2013

TEPCO to face lawsuits over hospital evacuation deaths

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201302220075

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Relatives of seven patients who died in the course of evacuating a hospital near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear disaster site are planning to sue the plant operator for compensation.

They blame Tokyo Electric Power Co. for the chaos that ensued when it lost control of three reactors and contributed to a muddled evacuation of surrounding districts. In all, 40 patients from Futaba Hospital died during the initial evacuation or shortly thereafter.

In July, a government commission said a delay in evacuating patients was largely due to poor cooperation between the prefectural government, the Self-Defense Forces and the police. It did not fault hospital officials. The findings were published in the final report of the central government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations.

The claimants plan to file a lawsuit demanding 30 million yen (\$321,000) for each of the seven victims at the Tokyo District Court on the grounds that TEPCO's nuclear accident was the causative factor. They decided to name TEPCO alone so as to clarify where the responsibility lies and to try to limit the court case from becoming too drawn out.

The first four claimants will file their bids in March.

"We cannot comment because we are not aware that the lawsuit has in fact been submitted. If it is submitted, we will deal with it in a sincere manner," said a TEPCO official.

Futaba Hospital lies about five kilometers southwest of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. At the time of the accident in March 2011, the facility held about 340 patients, most of them senior citizens.

The government panel and hospital officials said evacuations began on March 12, 2011, after the central government issued an order for all residents within a 10-kilometer radius of the plant to leave.

However, the evacuation was disrupted because the plant began to experience devastating hydrogen explosions.

It took close to five days to evacuate the hospital fully, by which time four patients had died there. Another 15 passed away in or shortly after transit, and later in March, an additional 21 patients died while being moved again to sites farther from the disaster zone.

Fumio Shinkai, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said the seven victims referred to in this lawsuit were between 60 and 100 in age.

The bereaved family members will argue that were it not for the accident, the patients would not have been forced to evacuate, and there would have been no interruption of their care and treatment.

ONE FAMILY'S PAIN

One couple involved is Masayoshi and Noriko Abe, aged 76 and 71, respectively. They now live in Soma because their home in Namie--about eight kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant--was swept away by the tsunami in March 2011.

In the Buddhist altar inside their new home is a photo of Masayoshi's father, Tadashi, who was 99 when he died.

In 2004, Tadashi entered a facility affiliated with Futaba Hospital which specialized in the care of senior citizens. He was subsequently admitted to the hospital itself after suffering a stroke and pneumonia.

Because she had lost her own father when she was only 3, Noriko felt she had inherited another after marriage. She would go to the hospital almost daily to check on Tadashi.

She visited Futaba Hospital for the final time on March 10, 2011. Because Tadashi was hard of hearing, Noriko had to speak loudly.

"Grandpa? How are you feeling?" she asked. "We have to celebrate your 100th birthday in November."

Tadashi replied, "Don't worry about me—because I plan to live until I am 120!"

That was the last exchange the pair had.

After the earthquake struck, Noriko frantically called the hospital a number of times, even while first fleeing the tsunami and later the radiation scare. However, she could never get through.

A few days later, she saw a news report that said a large number of Futaba Hospital patients had died while being evacuated to a gymnasium. She fretted even more.

On March 20, she found her father-in-law dead, lying in a coffin in a gymnasium in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.

She felt she should somehow have prevented his untimely death, and was beside herself with regret.

It turned out that Tadashi was one of the patients who remained in the hospital for some time after the evacuation order was first given.

Early on March 14, an SDF bus drove him to a facility in Minami-Soma. There, he cleared a check-up for radiation exposure, and was taken by bus to a high school gymnasium in Iwaki.

The bus arrived at the gym at 8 p.m. Tadashi was so cold he needed two blankets to keep warm. He died on March 16 from heart failure.

"He might not have died if he had been rescued earlier," said a doctor from Futaba Hospital.

In spring 2012, Noriko submitted an application for compensation to TEPCO to cover the cost of Tadashi's funeral and for purchasing a Buddhist home altar to honor him. It was not really the money she was interested in, she said, but an admission from the utility of where it felt responsibility lay.

She could not have predicted the humiliating response by a clerk when she tried to file the application: "These items are not presently covered for compensation," the representative declared.

Noriko felt like crying.

TEPCO eventually relented up to a point, and offered to meet compensation claims from relatives of those who died during the delayed evacuation from a hospital in Minami-Soma.

But by that time, Noriko had decided which course of action she would take.

"Even if we end up losing and having to pay court costs, I want to determine why Grandpa had to die."

(This article was compiled from reports by Shinichi Fujiwara and Noriyoshi Ohtsuki.)

What has become of the tsunami debris?

News Navigator: What has happened to debris from tsunami disaster areas?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130225p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Japan will soon mark two years since the Great East Japan Earthquake. The Mainichi answers common questions readers may have about what has happened to the debris generated by the disaster.

Question: What has become of the disaster debris?

Answer: It is being either processed locally or has been transferred to other prefectures. The Ministry of the Environment (MOE) has called for cooperation from all prefectures to share the processing of debris, particularly waste from Iwate and Miyagi prefectures that is considered to have safe radiation levels.

Q: How much debris needs to be processed in other prefectures?

A: At first, it was thought that 4.01 million tons out of the 20.45 million in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures would need to be processed in other areas. The two prefectures' governments have periodically updated their estimates, and this January they estimated that 690,000 tons out of 14.68 million would need processing, about one-sixth the original estimate.

Q: Why did the estimate fall?

A: At first the estimate was done from aerial photographs. Later investigators were able to go on-site for more accurate estimates, and the volume of debris that had floated out to sea was subtracted from the figure. Processing done until now has also reduced the amount.

Q: How many municipalities accepted debris for processing?

A: **Fifteen prefectures, not counting Iwate and Miyagi.** As of January this year, 250,000 tons had been processed. According to the MOE, of the 690,000 tons still needing processing, plans for such work are in place for 620,000. Work on wood from Iwate Prefecture and burnable waste from Miyagi Prefecture are expected to be completed by the end of March, and Iwate Prefecture's other burnable waste is expected to be processed by the end of the year. For the remaining 70,000 tons of non-burnable debris, wood, fishing nets and other fishing equipment, the MOE is looking for nearby prefectures that can handle the work. It is also considering processing within Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

Q: Have other prefectures accepted the situation regarding the debris?

A: Not always. There have been arrests when residents concerned about the debris containing radiation have tried to prevent it from being shipped to their prefectures.

Q: How were municipalities convinced to accept the debris?

A: In the case of Shimada, Shizuoka Prefecture, the first municipality to accept debris, it held test burnings before accepting the waste. It allowed members of the public to be present as radiation measurements were taken, and it publically released the ash. **It also set safety standards that were stricter than those of the national government, raising trust in its assertions that the debris was safe.**

Q: When will the widespread processing of debris end?

A: The MOE has set a goal of finishing the processing of all disaster debris from Miyagi and Iwate prefectures by the end of March next year. (Answers by Yoshitaka Yamamoto, Shizuoka Bureau) February 25, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

"Families can no longer live normal happy lives"

February 27, 2013

Japanese disaster films highlight victims' stories

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302270104>

The unnerving clicks of dosimeters are constant as people wearing white protective gear quickly visit the radiated no-go zones of decayed farms and empty storefronts. Evacuees huddle on blankets on gymnasium floors, waiting futilely for word of compensation and relocation.

Such scenes fill the flurry of independent films inspired by Japan's March 2011 catastrophe that tell stories of regular people who became overnight victims--stories the creators feel are being ignored by mainstream media and often silenced by the authorities.

Nearly two years after the quake and tsunami disaster, the films are an attempt by the creative minds of Japan's movie industry not only to confront the horrors of the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, but also as a legacy and to empower the victims by telling their story for international audiences.

The impact these films have on the global and Japanese audiences could perhaps even help change Japan, the directors say.

What's striking is that many of the works convey a prevailing message: The political, scientific and regulatory establishment isn't telling the whole truth about the nuclear disaster. And much of the public had been in the past ignorant and uncaring about Fukushima.

And so the films were needed, the auteurs say. The people leading Japan were too evasive about the true consequences of the multiple meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant--minimizing people's suffering, playing down health risks and shrugging off accountability for past go-go pro-nuclear government policies.

"Japan's response is ambiguous and irresponsible. But, meanwhile, time is passing," said Atsushi Funahashi, director of "Nuclear Nation," which documented the story of the residents of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, the town where the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant is located.

The entire town became a no-go zone--contaminated by radiation in the air, water and ground after the tsunami destroyed the plant's cooling systems, causing meltdowns in three reactors. Decommissioning the reactors is expected to take decades.

Of all Fukushima communities forced to evacuate, Futaba chose the farthest spot from the nuclear plant--an abandoned high school in Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo. That choice Funahashi feels highlights a keen awareness of the dangers of radiation and distrust of officials as the town had been repeatedly told the plant was safe.

The outburst of post-disaster filmmaking includes Americans living in or visiting Japan, such as "Surviving Japan," by Christopher Noland, "Pray for Japan," by Stuart Levy and "In the Grey Zone" and "A2" by Ian Thomas Ash.

"The Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom," by Lucy Walker, a Briton, was nominated for the 2012 Academy Award in short documentaries.

Both Levy and Noland volunteered in the disaster areas. Ash's documentaries focus on the plight of the children, who continue to live near the nuclear plant, and the frightened mothers who suspect the medical authorities are lying about the safety of radiation.

"I believe it is time for Japanese citizens to not just rebuild but reinvent their country with new leadership," said Noland, who like many others worries about the children. "I want the people of Japan to know I stand with them."

Funahashi's "Nuclear Nation," shown at film festivals including Berlin, Seoul and Edinburgh, Scotland, intentionally played out its scenes in real time to communicate the helplessness of the days slipping away for displaced people. Camera close-ups show the cold lunches in boxes being handed out, day by day.

Funahashi is outraged that, so many months later, the Japanese government has yet to properly compensate the 160,000 people who had to leave their homes near Fukushima plant. The government has set up tiny temporary housing and has doled out aid calculated to approximate the minimum wage.

In one moving scene in "Nuclear Nation," one of the displaced residents, Masayoshi Watanabe, lights up a cigarette in a car and talks directly into the camera, strangely more movie-like than any Hollywood actor. "Our town is gone. It's just land," he says pensively.

The movie started with 1,400 people in the school building, but that has dwindled lately to about 100. Funahashi is determined to keep filming until the last person leaves.

"The evacuated people are being forgotten," said Funahashi. "And criminal responsibility is also being forgotten."

Reputed director Sion Sono has also written and directed the sarcastically titled "The Land of Hope," departing from his usual ruthlessly violent avant-garde for a soap-operatic account of an elderly couple who commit suicide after a nuclear catastrophe set in the fictitious future.

Sono's "Himizu," a haunting coming-of-age film set in a surreal Japan hopelessly covered with tsunami debris, is more typical Sono in its raw dark style, criticizing the adult world as irresponsibly cruel and abusive to this nation's younger generation that must cope with radiation.

Yojyu Matsubayashi took a more standard documentary approach for his "Fukushima: Memories of the Lost Landscape," interviewing people who were displaced in the Fukushima town of Minami-Soma.

He followed them into temporary shelters in cluttered gymnasiums and accompanied their harried visits to abandoned homes with the gentle patience of a video-journalist. Japanese mainstream media had abandoned the no-go zone, and he felt it was up to freelance reporters like him to tell the true story, especially for the helpless elderly.

"I've been making documentaries for some time, but when the nuclear accident happened, I felt I had to be there," he said. "Once I got there, I knew I had to be there for a long time and express the eternal from that one spot."

His main message?

He wouldn't have made a movie if it were all that simple, Matsubayashi said quietly.

"It was human arrogance that led to this disaster, this crisis," he said. "We thought we could control even nature. And that's why this happened. Our lives were dependent on electricity from Fukushima. We shouldn't be making excuses that we didn't know, that we didn't care. Maybe that's why I made this movie."

Others are finding their work is drawing more attention after Fukushima.

Hitomi Kamanaka, who has devoted her life to documenting radiation issues, such as the struggles over a Japanese nuclear reprocessing plant and sicknesses in Iraq suspected of being caused by uranium bullets, is in the spotlight like never before.

Her 2012 film "Living With Internal Exposure" compiled the views from four medical experts, who had studied radiation's effects in Chernobyl, Hiroshima, Iraq and Fukushima, warning about the health damage that radiation can cause.

Akiyoshi Imazeki began shooting "Kalina's Apple, Forest of Chernobyl" in 2003, a film about a girl who falls sick by eating the radiated apples grown on her grandmother's farm. It was a film he believed in, but he had never hoped for massive appeal.

His post-Fukushima 2011 re-edit--with its juxtaposition of pastoral lakes and forests, so much like Fukushima landscapes, with the forlorn faces of children hospitalized for cancer--is striking home with many Japanese.

The film was shot quietly like many Japanese classics, and the cast is entirely Belarusian and Russian. But the dozens of screenings in Fukushima are drawing positive reviews.

"They all cry," said Imazeki.

Imazeki is convinced the parallels between Fukushima and Chernobyl are striking, and stressed "Kalina's Apple, Forest of Chernobyl" dramatizes the tragedy of radiation.

"The invisibility adds to the turmoil," he said. "Families can no longer live normal happy lives."

* * *

Online:

"Nuclear Nation" official site: <http://nuclearnation.jp/en/>

"Surviving Japan" official site: <http://survivingjapanmovie.com/>

"Pray for Japan" official site: <http://prayforjapan-film.org/>

Ian Thomas Ash: <http://www.documentingian.com/>

"The Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom" official site: <http://thetsunamiandthecherryblossom.com/>

"The Land of Hope" trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPv3BX39dPk>

"Himizu" official site: <http://thirdwindowfilms.com/films/himizu>

"Fukushima: Memories of the Lost Landscape" official site: <http://www.somakanka.com/eng.html>

"Fukushima: Memories of the Lost Landscape" trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMeMk38tyrs>

"Kalina's Apple, Forest of Chernobyl" <http://kalina-movie.com>

I do feel lonely at times

February 26, 2013

School in evacuated town in Fukushima has no new first grade students

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130226p2a00m0na016000c.html>



Four second-graders that remained in Namie Elementary School study in a large classroom in the city of Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

NAMIE, Fukushima -- A local elementary school here will have no new first-grade students entering this spring after the whole town was evacuated following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear plant crisis in March 2011.

Namie Elementary School is the town's only remaining public elementary school. It combined the town's six elementary schools and moved classrooms to the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu. However, many students who would have gone to Namie Elementary School have transferred to schools in towns where they evacuated.

According to the town's board of education, there were a total of about 1,000 students in the six elementary schools in the town prior to the earthquake. However, about half of the students evacuated outside of the prefecture. Even those who remained within the prefecture had spread to 33 different municipalities as of April 2012.

The town reopened Namie elementary in August 2011, using a closed-down school in the city of Nihonmatsu to which the town moved its office functions. However, there are only 30 students remaining at Namie elementary for this school year. After 12 six-graders graduate in March, the number of remaining students will be 18 for the next school year. Although the school sent information brochures to about 100 houses within the school district with first- and second-graders and with children who would be entering elementary schools in April, no one responded.

Natsumi Fujita, 38, a mother of two children who go to a school in Nihonmatsu, said, "By the time Namie elementary reopened, the children had got used to their new school. I want the school (Namie) to survive, but it's better for the children to attend schools where many other children study with them."

On the other hand, Yaiko Konno, 35, whose two children commute to Namie elementary from a temporary housing unit in Nihonmatsu worries about the future of the school, saying "My children chose Namie elementary because they thought their friends would be back once the school reopened. The town

should have contacted more parents when the school was reopening. If the school keeps losing students, it might close down."

"This is the best school for me because I know people here, but some of my friends left after the earthquake and I do feel lonely at times," said Ryo Matsumoto, 12, a sixth-grader at Namie Elementary School.

Hiroko Takeuchi, 48, a teacher at the school, is troubled by her feelings. "I can't tell students who're doing fine at their new schools to come back. At the same time, the school is needed for the town to recover," she said.

Namie Elementary School started a class last year called "Hometown Namie" that teaches about the town's culture and traditions so that children won't forget about their hometown. School principal Kenichi Ishii is determined to "protect the school until there are no students left to encourage those who have evacuated throughout the country."

Meanwhile, the town is also losing its junior high school students. Only 49 students attend Namie Junior High School that reopened by combining the town's three schools that once had about 600 students in total. The town's board of education chief, Kiichiro Hatakeyama, said, "For the town's recovery, we'll work on rebuilding schools no matter how many years it might take."

Another 6 to 10 years to rebuild communities

March 1, 2013

Survey: Half of disaster-hit communities need 6 to 10 more years to rebuild

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201303010087>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

More than half of local governments devastated by the 2011 disaster in northeastern Japan say they will need six to 10 more years to completely rebuild their communities, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

Although two-thirds of the 42 local leaders surveyed welcomed the anti-disaster public works projects pushed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, 30 percent were negative about the measure, citing possible labor shortages and rising materials costs that have already affected the Tohoku rebuilding process.

Responses to questions about the pace of reconstruction appeared to depend on the location of the communities.

Only one leader in the disaster area around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant said there has been progress in the rebuilding effort so far. Municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture are also facing difficulties persuading evacuated residents to return to their homes.

The survey covered 42 cities, towns and villages in coastal areas of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures that were hard hit by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The municipalities included 12 in Fukushima Prefecture that came under evacuation orders after the natural disasters caused the nuclear accident at the No. 1 plant.

According to the survey, 22 of the local leaders cited a time frame of six to 10 years to finish work to restore and rebuild their communities.

“It will take six to 10 more years for us to return to our village and acquire a firm footing for reconstruction,” said Masahide Matsumoto, mayor of Katsurao village in Fukushima Prefecture.

Ten leaders said the work should wind up “within three years,” while eight said “four to five years.” Takafumi Yamauchi, mayor of Kuji, Iwate Prefecture, who gave an estimate of up to three years, said central government assistance was needed for the rebuilding efforts.

“Since the human cost of the disaster was limited in our city, the recovery work is going well,” Yamauchi said. “We want the central government to continue to back us without relaxing its hand of support.”

One official was more pessimistic, saying “11 to 15 years” would be needed to complete the recovery. One leader declined to respond to the question.

Around 66 percent of those surveyed described Abe’s initiative to enhance the nation’s preparedness for huge quakes and other natural disasters through public works as “positive” or “somewhat positive.”

“If all of the nation benefits, so does the affected region,” said Kimiaki Toda, mayor of Ofunato in Iwate Prefecture, who assessed Abe’s plan positively.

One local leader had a “negative” view of the program, while 12 others described it as “somewhat negative,” according to the survey.

One local chief did not reply.

“We are concerned that the pace of reconstruction could be slowed because of a possible shortage of labor and materials,” said Jin Sato, mayor of Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture.

Fukushima was the prefecture most positive about the central government’s public works program, with 12 of the 15 heads welcoming the projects.

The prefecture was also the most negative in terms of assessing the pace of recovery and reconstruction so far.

Overall, 22 of the 42 leaders cited progress, while 19 said there has been little progress. One official gave a different answer.

In Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, 18 of the 27 local leaders said there has been progress in the work. But in Fukushima Prefecture, 11 of the 15 chiefs said little progress is evident.

Fukushima Prefecture has had to deal with the added burden of cleaning up radioactive substances that spewed from the plant. The decontamination process has slowed reconstruction, and persistent fears of radiation have prevented residents from returning, exacerbating the delay in finalizing rebuilding plans in some areas.

The survey asked the 12 leaders of Fukushima municipalities where residents were forced to evacuate about the percentage of residents they expect will return to their homes around the No. 1 nuclear plant.

Five said 60 to 70 percent, while two said 80 to 90 percent. Four replied that they will work to bring back 100 percent.

But they noted that the return of all residents will be increasingly difficult if their evacuation is prolonged. A survey conducted jointly by the central government’s Reconstruction Agency and the stricken municipalities found that nearly half of the people from at least one local government have no intention of returning home.

The figure was 40 percent for Tomioka, which co-hosts the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant and is within the 20-kilometer no-entry zone of the No. 1 plant.

Five of the 12 local chiefs said they expected residents to return “within five years,” while four said it will take “six to 10 years.”

The mayor of Okuma, home to the No. 1 plant, said “11 to 15 years.”

All 12 Fukushima leaders said the general public’s memory of the nuclear disaster is fading.

Kawauchi was the only municipality of the 12 in Fukushima that cited progress in the rebuilding effort, according to The Asahi Shimbun survey.

Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo said work was advancing faster compared with neighboring cities and towns. Perhaps the main reason was that radiation levels in Kawauchi are comparatively low despite being located within 30 km of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

In January 2012, Endo called on villagers to return home. He moved the functions of the village hall and school back to Kawauchi in spring that year.

Abe called Kawauchi a “front-runner in rebuilding.” With the help of state subsidies and other sources, companies from Tokyo and Osaka are setting up factories in the village. They are expected to provide jobs to residents who used to work in the nuclear industry or on farms.

A large convenience store chain set up an outlet in Kawauchi late last year, with the Reconstruction Agency working as an intermediary.

On Feb. 26, the village hall signed an agreement with a German company to host a large solar power plant. Work to clean up the area surrounding about 1,200 households in the village is nearing completion, Endo said.

But the village, which had a pre-disaster population of 3,000, saw only around 1,100 residents return, including those who are dividing their lives in the village and their evacuation sites.

“We have not necessarily generated the results we wanted to see, although the foundation for rebuilding was laid out,” Endo said.

Still, the village is well ahead of other local governments, many of which have yet to even start their recovery operations.

Iitate, a village with high radiation levels northwest of the No. 1 plant, is one of the municipalities that has fallen behind.

“I cannot picture the reconstruction of our village because we have been unable to use central government subsidies and the special zone designation,” said Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno.

The central government has introduced a variety of programs to promote rebuilding. For example, subsidies for public housing, eased regulations and tax breaks are available in special zone designations in the stricken region.

Katsuya Endo, mayor of Tomioka, said it is difficult to tell if the special zone designation is generating the intended results.

Resentment over taxes on compensation

March 4, 2013

Residents miffed by taxes on Fukushima nuclear disaster compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130304p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster have voiced resentment over taxes imposed on part of the compensation they have received for the disaster.

The national government maintains that taxes levied on compensation paid to salaried workers and business operators to make up for disaster-related losses are no different from taxes on their pre-disaster income.

Still, business operators and farmers in Fukushima Prefecture feel that such taxation is a heavy burden, and some critics have pointed out that the taxation pours cold water on victims' enthusiasm for disaster recovery.

The Sendai Regional Taxation Bureau, which has jurisdiction over Fukushima Prefecture, is desperately trying to win understanding from local taxpayers, but locals are far from happy.

Hiroshi Miura, 63, a rice farmer in the Odaka district of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, was surprised to learn he has to pay 1.2 million in income tax on his earnings in 2012, including compensation for the disaster. He had paid virtually no income tax before the crisis broke out.

Income tax is based on income after expenses. Up until the March 11, 2011 disaster, Miura had earned 8 to 10 million yen a year growing rice in a five-hectare rice paddy, cultivating vegetables in a farm measuring 6,000 square meters, and raising chickens. After deducting expenses for fertilizer and other supplies, the amount of his income tax was minimal.

He resumed rice farming on farmland he rented in Shinchi, Fukushima Prefecture, because little progress had been made in decontamination of his neighborhood. He received tens of millions of yen in a lump sum covering the period up to 2016 to make up for a decrease in his income following the nuclear crisis. At the same time, his expenses decreased considerably because the size of the rice paddy he rents is less than half that of his own paddy. This caused his income tax bill to surge.

In Minamisoma and other areas affected by the disaster, the deadline for filing tax returns has been extended. Still, as Miura needs to pay a massive amount of tax, he cannot freely use the compensation he has received. When he looks back on the two-year period following the disaster, he feels the tax burden has been heavy -- unlike times before then.

Just a handful of the 120 farming households belonging to an agricultural organization that Miura heads have resumed their farming business.

"Disaster recovery efforts have just begun. Farmers need larger farmland and equipment. In addition, they need to rebuild their houses," Miura said.

The local tourism industry has also been hit hard by harmful rumors about radiation contamination in the prefecture. Three companies belonging to the Fukushima Prefecture Travel Agents Association, which has about 110 members, closed down following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster.

SKC Tourist, based in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Kitakata, struggled to move back into the black following the nuclear accident.

"All reservations for several months following the accident were cancelled. We had to try harder to keep ourselves afloat," said SKC President Jiro Kobayashi, who heads the association.

Taxation was imposed on compensation he received to make up for losses his company suffered in 2011. Though it appears compensation has boosted SKC's profits to the levels seen before the onset of the nuclear disaster, the company has had to struggle to keep afloat amid harmful rumors, just like many other travel agencies in the prefecture.

Kobayashi voiced anger at the taxation, saying it has dampened his firm's strenuous efforts.

"Is taxation levied simply to offset the free compensation we've received for our losses?" he asked.

Memorial to Futaba victims

March 3, 2013

Monument to victims of 2011 disaster dedicated in Futaba

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303030016>

By SHUNSUKE KIMURA/ Staff Writer

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--In the shadow of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, about 40 people clad in protective gear attended a ceremony on March 2 marking the completion of a memorial dedicated to residents of Futaba who died in the 2011 disaster.

Bereaved family members and town officials prayed for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, and those who died during the evacuation after the nuclear crisis unfolded.

Masashi Yoshida, who lost his wife, Kimie, 42, took part in the dedication, holding her photo.

"Two years passed by like a flash," said Yoshida, 49, who evacuated to Iwaki in the prefecture. "I wish I could put her ashes in the grave in the town soon."

All the residents of Futaba, which co-hosts the plant, are still not allowed to return to their homes due to high radiation levels.

The monument was installed in the town's center, around 3 kilometers from the plant, where preparations for decommissioning the crippled reactors are under way.

Twenty people lost their lives when the towering tsunami hit. The whereabouts of one resident is unknown.

Since the town was evacuated, 164 more residents have died. Futaba had a population of about 7,000 before the disaster.

Bouillabaisse or sake ? Some ways of getting on with life after the disaster

Trying to get things done in the wake of 3/11

by C.W. Nicol

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2013/03/03/environment/trying-to-get-things-done-in-the-wake-of-311/#.UTMNFDf1tEs>



Two years have passed since the magnitude-9 Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, the devastating tsunami it triggered and the disgraceful and deadly fiasco at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant that followed.

When Japan was in trouble, people all over the world stepped up to offer assistance. Many individuals and groups donated goods and money, while others, with the U.S. Marine Corps to the fore, gave their time and expertise. The global response was heartwarming despite the slow, often bogged down, and frequently nonexistent pace of recovery. Profoundly heartwarming, too, was the uncomplaining stoicism of the people in the northeastern Tohoku region of Honshu who had lost and suffered so much.

Our Afan Woodland Trust was asked by the town of Higashi Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture to help relocate a destroyed school to nearby densely forested hillocks.

Since then we have conducted environmental surveys, written and presented reports, gone around to all the area's schools, attended more meetings than we can count, talked to everybody from elementary school children to seniors, held seminars, brought together local and international volunteers to begin clearing brush, presented the needs to so many people in Japan and abroad; it all goes on but we face barriers of paperwork and it seems almost impossible to get officials to make any concrete decisions upon which we can act.

The local people want things to happen — children, parents, teachers, old folk and most of the town officials — but we struggle up sandhills and get sucked down into the quicksand of bureaucratic language purposefully created to stymie and confuse the efforts of any outsider to bring about any change at all.

Even with politics supposedly changed recently at the national level, it makes no difference to the coprolitic mind-set of mid-level bureaucrats who stay out of the rain, refuse to do anything and stubbornly persevere with excuses to do nothing until the two or three years they spend at each position before being rotated away is spent.

Don't rock the boat, that's the credo — and for heaven's sake don't let anybody else stand up, or try to paddle, row or hoist a sail.

Japan's unique *amakudari* (literally, "descent from heaven") system of retiring bureaucrats getting lucrative jobs with companies and organizations they were often overseeing or, indeed, commissioning, not only gives these descending angels plump cushions to land on, but also fuels a system whereby government funds are funnelled to a network of good-old-boy contacts and contracts.

Conversely, if you are not part of the network and if your project doesn't fall into that basket, then the old boys behind the desks do their best to block it.

It is incredibly frustrating, but I will not be ground down. As a Celtic Japanese (Welsh born, Japanese citizenship), I love a good scrap. Fortunately, attempting to influence public opinion and engaging in media guerrilla warfare is easily possible in this country because of our freedom of speech. Television stations and newspapers based in Tohoku ask me to do interviews and programmes, and I get invited to give public lectures. In certain other countries a protester might vanish, be deported or get thrown in jail. Not so in Japan — not yet, anyway.

Despite the bureaucratic and political setbacks, here and there progress is being made by individuals, especially young people who have set out to do something, to innovate and improve things, without any help from the government.

For example, in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, where much of the town and all of its harbor fishery facilities were wiped out by the tsunami, a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Miyazaki, returned from studying and working in France to rebuild the family's marine-products business.

The harbor facilities were all gone, but the family had an outdated old factory up on higher land which they struggled to refurbish with new equipment — going way out on a limb financially to do so.

Hiroyuki Miyazaki, who qualified as a sommelier in France and worked there in the food industry, had always been bothered by the waste of small, supposedly unmarketable fish taken in trap nets set into the seabed offshore. However, remembering the bouillabaisse he had enjoyed in Marseilles, he got the local fishermen to cooperate and to keep the pomfrets, gurnards, sculpins, blennies, bitterlings and many other

diminutive species that would otherwise be tossed aside. All of these fish are perfectly edible and widely enjoyed by local anglers fishing off the docks and rocks.

To make his Tohoku bouillabaisse, Miyazaki guts and cleans a mixture of six kinds of fish, then cooks them first in a huge steam-heated cauldron with olive oil and garlic, to which is added onion paste, a mixture of herbs (in which fennel figures prominently), carrot paste, tomatoes and the lees from producing red wine — a byproduct that is normally thrown away or fed to cattle. This mixture is constantly stirred with a big wooden paddle until thoroughly cooked, and the aroma is simply mouthwatering!

Next, water is added and it's all brought to the boil and simmered for an hour. The resulting mixture is then put through a blender twice to make a rich red potage which is vacuum packed and easily transported and stored. Because the recipe uses whole (gutted) fish, this bouillabaisse is rich in protein, calcium, collagen, minerals and what-have-you. When you reheat it you can add whatever fish, shellfish or vegetables you like — and I'd swear it's as good, or better, than any bouillabaisse I've had in France.

My travels in Tohoku have also taken me to Sanbongi in the Miyagi Prefecture city of Osaki. In that inland town which was badly damaged by the earthquake I met 38-year-old Iwao Niizawa, a fifth-generation sake brewer. The family's original brewery buildings, built in 1873, had been destroyed, and even if they could have been repaired, the insurance companies would not cover the cost.

Undeterred, Niizawa decided to relocate and build a new brewery in the nearby town of Kawasaki. The site is surrounded by forested hills, with no refuse dumps or golf courses or anything else that could taint the groundwater. He bored a 25-meter-deep well and got pure, cold, soft water — ideal for sake-making.

The brewing of sake is more complicated than making beer or wine, as it is created through a process known as “multiple parallel fermentation.” Key to this is *kōji*, a malted-rice bio-activator peculiar to each make of sake — and fortunately, this precious ingredient had survived the collapse of the old building.

On visiting the new factory, I was at once struck by the youth of the workers and by the fact that young women were taking part in the process, something which never used to happen. These young ladies had all graduated from college, where they had studied brewing and fermentation. They were keen and worked hard. It was refreshing to see them there.

Niizawa is striving, and in my view succeeding, in creating a unique sake that is suitable for enjoying with meals, like a light and somewhat dry white wine. Sake is one of the few drinks that can give me a fearful hangover, so since my fifties I have generally avoided it. For me, it is generally just too sweet — but Niizawa's brand, named Hakuraku Sei, was a delightful surprise. It is the best sake I've found so far, and

goes well with anything from sashimi to cheese — and *sans doute* it will go well with Miyazaki's bouillabaisse.

After our huge party in Tokyo on Feb. 20, to which I invited readers in last month's Notebook, I head back to Tohoku to go on tilting at bureaucratic windmills and communing with other souls who are doing their best to rebuild Japan.

Miyagi girl at the U.N.

March 5, 2013

High school girl from disaster zone to give speech at U.N.

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2013/03/05/20130305p2a00m0na013000c/001.html>

An 18-year-old girl from a tsunami-devastated Miyagi Prefecture town will have the ears of the world on March 6 when she gives a speech in front of a special United Nations session in New York City.

Honoka Miura, a student at Motoyoshi Hibiki High School in the town of Kesenuma, will speak at the Special Session on Water and Disasters, stressing the need to tap teenagers' ideas to rebuild Japan's Tohoku region. Miura has spearheaded a campaign to engage youth in reconstruction planning in her own town.

"I want to deliver a message calling for the use of young people's power," Miura said before leaving on March 4 to make her speech, which will also be attended by Crown Prince Naruhito.

Miura's Minamisanriku home was washed away by the March 11, 2011 tsunami. She fled to higher ground with her family, where she saw young children looking very sad. Then a first-year high school student, Miura was also a "junior leader" for the local children. Thinking that she could "do something" to help the distraught kids, she sang songs and read them stories, and the kids even began calling her "principal."

As disaster recovery began, Miura and her friends talked about how they could get the junior leaders in on the reconstruction of Minamisanriku. Backed by a non-governmental organization, she conducted a survey of young children and found that they, too, wanted to get involved.

In June 2012, she presented a proposal to Minamisanriku Mayor Hitoshi Sato featuring a "community center complete with a cafe." With the proposal, Miura wanted to convey her desire to help people "restore the human connections transcending age that existed before the disaster but that fell apart in temporary housing complexes." Her activity caught the attention of United Nations officials, setting the stage for her to report on her own experiences at U.N. headquarters.

Still missing staff in disaster areas

March 5, 2013

Municipalities in disaster-hit areas suffer from acute staff shortages

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130305p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, hit hard by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, are faced with acute shortages of personnel as work to rebuild the devastated region has been steadily increasing.

Although 49 municipal governments in the three prefectures have asked the central government to dispatch a total of 1,490 staffers from April this year, only 475 people have been confirmed to have been secured by local governments across the country. Even if those people the affected municipalities hire on limited-time contracts are added to the list, the total number of workers the three prefectures can secure next fiscal year remains at 685, underscoring the possibility of several hundred staffers being in short supply.

The number of workers the three prefectures have asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications to send next fiscal year as of Feb. 12, 2013 stands at 293 for nine municipalities in Iwate Prefecture, 941 for 15 municipalities in Miyagi Prefecture, and 256 for 25 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. The number of people the three prefectures had asked the government to send this fiscal year was 840, and therefore the number of people they are asking the central government to send next fiscal year is 1.8 times the figure for the current fiscal year.

The municipalities have been faced with more and more acute staff shortages because work to rebuild the devastated areas has been on the rise in tandem with progress in reconstruction efforts. Thus, the central government finds it difficult to meet the requests from the disaster-stricken municipalities to send more workers. With the help of local governments across the country, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications sent 451 staffers this fiscal year, but an official in charge said, "Two years have passed since the earthquake disasters occurred and there is no denying that the enthusiasm to extend support is dying down."

The disaster-stricken municipalities have been making efforts to secure extra employees through their own routes and other means, but an official of the Miyagi Prefectural Government, hit hardest by staffing shortages, said, "There is a possibility of about 300 people being in short supply in the prefecture." The three prefectures are asking particularly for larger numbers of nurses and experts in civil engineering, construction and machinery. The number of nurses requested by the three prefectures for next fiscal year is 2.1 times the number for the current fiscal year, followed by 2.0 times for experts in civil engineering, 1.9 times for experts in construction and machinery, and 1.7 times for desk workers.

Those people requested by the three prefectures are indispensable for rebuilding the disaster-hit region, but demand for experts in civil engineering and construction are also increasing among municipalities throughout the country. The trend is attributed in part to public works worth a total of 10.5 trillion yen earmarked in the supplementary budget for fiscal 2012 and the initial state budget for fiscal 2013 compiled by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet formed in December last year.

Growing number of evacuees won't be returning home

80 percent of evacuees from 3 prefectures won't return to hometowns: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130305p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Eighty percent of those who have evacuated from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, which were hit hard by the March 2011 disasters, will unlikely return to their hometowns, a survey has shown.

The Mainichi Shimbun recently conducted a survey on 118 evacuees -- 25 new respondents and 93 others who were covered by at least one previous Mainichi survey. Five of the 118 have evacuated from Iwate, 20 from Miyagi and 93 from Fukushima.

Of the respondents, 58 percent said they are considering settling down in prefectures other than their domiciles, and 22 percent said they have already done so. Only 20 percent said they have no intention of permanently living in other prefectures. The survey was the fourth of its kind carried out by the Mainichi.

Those thinking about settling down in other prefectures have kept steadily growing. The figure, which stood at 54 percent in a survey conducted six months after the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis, rose to 63 percent a year after the triple disasters and then 75 percent 1 1/2 years after the calamity.

In the latest survey, the Mainichi for the first time asked the respondents whether they have already settled down in other prefectures.

Asked why they want to settle down in prefectures other than their domiciles or why they have already done so, most people, 37, cited their **concerns about possible radiation exposure**, followed by 36 who pointed out that there are no prospects that they can return to their original neighborhoods in the foreseeable future.

Just half of the respondents said their family members are living separately, and 27 percent of them answered that their wives are taking shelter with their children while their husbands are living apart. Of those who responded to the latest survey, 42 percent are living in apartments introduced to them by local governments without paying rent, while 27 percent are taking shelter at apartments that they found on their own and have local bodies paying the rent. Twelve percent are living in apartments and paying their own rent.

Roughly half of them said they are worried about their temporary housing while the rest answered they are not. Many of those who have voiced concern cited they do not know what to do after the three-year period of living in temporary housing ends while they have no prospects of returning to their neighborhoods.

The government has extended the two-year legal limit on the period of living in temporary housing units for those who have evacuated following the March 2011 disasters to three years, and is considering extending it by another year.

Regarding their financial conditions, nearly 60 percent of the evacuees surveyed said they are in financial distress just like in the previous survey, with 24 percent saying they are struggling to make a living and 35 percent answering their financial conditions are relatively tough.

Over half of those who have evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture, 58 percent voiced concerns about health hazards that could be caused by radioactive substances leaking from the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Many of them said they are worried about the health conditions of their children in the future while others said they might have been exposed to radiation while being evacuated.

Of the Fukushima evacuees, 42 percent demanded that atomic power stations be immediately decommissioned, and 56 percent insisted that nuclear plants be shut down on a step-by-step bases while a mere 2 percent said such power plants should be retained.

About half, or 46 individuals, fled their neighborhoods at the instruction of local governments while 47 voluntarily did so.

Eighty percent responded that they do not feel they are being discriminated against because of the nuclear disaster. The remaining 20 percent said they feel they are facing discrimination with many of them pointing out that people around them made offensive remarks about the nuclear disaster or strangers curiously looked at the Fukushima license plates of their cars.

Gov't moves on concrete

March 4, 2013

New concrete plants to counter shortage in tsunami region

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201303040067>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government hopes to alleviate a bottleneck in reconstruction work across Japan's disaster zone by building several new plants to mix concrete there, including those based on barges.

The plants will be located in four districts of Iwate and Fukushima prefectures, with a possible additional fixed facility in Miyagi Prefecture, the land ministry announced on March 3. They will be built with public money.

Reconstruction projects have proliferated rapidly in recent months, and the fresh, newly mixed concrete needed for roads and buildings has proved to be in short supply.

Amid concerns that the shortage may restrict the overall pace of recovery, a committee focusing on reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake unveiled the new plan at a meeting in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture.

Two of the plants will be fixed facilities constructed in Miyako district and Kamaishi district, both in Iwate Prefecture. They will, in part, supply concrete for the construction of a new expressway along the Sanriku coast linking Sendai and Hachinohe, Aomori Prefecture.

The expressway project will reach full speed in 2014. Construction of certain sections, particularly tunnels, will require significant amounts of concrete, and ministry officials believe private suppliers will be unable to meet that demand alone.

In Ofunato district, Iwate Prefecture, and Soso district, Fukushima Prefecture, the ministry will acquire concrete mixing plants fixed aboard floating barges to supply contractors, such as those involved in rebuilding ports. The private companies will lease the plants from the government, but it will cover the usage fees.

At the meeting, the ministry also unveiled its estimate of the upcoming shortfall in nine regions in the three northeastern prefectures along the Sanriku coast.

It predicts that Kesenuma district, Ishinomaki district and Sendai district in Miyagi Prefecture will be unable to meet demand.

The four other districts are the ones where new plants will be built, but the ministry is considering signing off on an additional plant, in Kesennuma.

It is not only disaster recovery work that will boost demand for fresh concrete. Broad-based economic stimulus spending under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration will result in a greater number of public works projects nationwide.

And while building new plants may fix one bottleneck, others could yet emerge—including a shortage of sand, a raw ingredient of concrete.

(This article was written by Satoshi Kimura and Miho Tanaka.)

Fukushima people still worried about radiation

Cleanup work progresses in Fukushima, but residents still concerned

By SHUNSUKE KIMURA/ Staff Writer

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303070075>

FUKUSHIMA--For a problem caused by such advanced technology, the solution sounds decidedly low-tech.

Work to decontaminate areas awash with radioactive materials spewed from the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant two years ago generally centers on mowing grass, removing topsoil and wiping the roofs of homes with rags.

In the mountainous Onami district of Fukushima, some 56 kilometers from the crippled facility, radiation levels have come down sharply after cleanup crews had been through.

Some 470 homes in the district have been decontaminated to date, but that does not mean that residents' concerns have been allayed.

"Generally, people are reasonably satisfied, certainly to some extent," says Toshimichi Sato, 62, chief of a residents' association in the Onami district. "But they are not totally satisfied, either. The fact is, radiation is still a big problem that haunts us two years after the disaster."

The central government plans to complete the mammoth task of decontamination in highly contaminated areas in 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture by March 2014, excluding forests. Local governments are responsible for other areas.

Full-scale decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture first got under way in the Onami district in October 2011, seven months after the onset of the crisis.

On the first day that work started, then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda visited the district for an on-site inspection.

Given the lack of knowledge in how to remove radioactive materials efficiently, cleanup workers initially concentrated on washing tiles on roofs and collecting mud in gutters.

The work progressed fairly smoothly in Onami because a storage site for the contaminated soil was secured early on.

According to the Fukushima city government, the average radiation level measured at the entrances of 109 homes in the Onami district was 0.8 microsievert per hour in February 2012.

The figure is half of what it was before the decontamination work started, but many residents are keen for additional decontamination work to be carried out.

"Everyone is agonizing day after day," Sato says. "But if we give up, that will be the end of it. We will ask the government (to take further measures).

"We are not hoping they will create a brand new community. All we want is to return our Onami district to what it was before the disaster."

On a chilly day in late February, 62-year-old Yoshiharu Suda surveyed his snow-covered garden in Onami. The garden used to have more than 30 trees. Most were removed as part of decontamination work. Among the few exceptions is a persimmon tree that had been planted by Suda's mother as a housewarming present.

"My mother says the tree is bearing fruit," Suda says, examining the blackish persimmons that are left on the tree. The fruit is normally orange-red in color. "But I told her we cannot eat them."

Replacing topsoil with new dirt brought the radiation level at his house and garden down from 2.9 microsieverts per hour to 0.7 microsievert.

Suda says the radiation level is currently around 0.4 microsievert, but he is worried that it may rise.

"I'm scared that (the radiation level) may rise when the snow melts," he says. "But we probably have no choice but to keep on living here."

According to the Environment Ministry, the success of decontamination work varies depending on where the work is carried out and which procedures are employed.

A ministry survey found radiation levels of gutters, street runoffs and entrances to storm drains fell by 60 to 90 percent by first removing mud and wiping the surfaces or using high-pressure hoses.

Tests on various types of roof surfaces resulted in different levels of effectiveness.

Radiation levels on commonplace roofs were slashed by 20 to 60 percent, but decontamination work had only a limited effect on roofs made of cement tiles, mat clay tiles and painted steel sheets.

The ministry said the surface roughness, rust and other factors might compromise the effectiveness of decontamination work.

Removing topsoil at depths of between 3 and 5 centimeters reduced radiation levels by 40 to 80 percent. Radiation levels also dropped by 70 to 90 percent when surface grass was removed.

Decontamination work on asphalt or concrete-paved parking lots nearly halved radiation levels.

But spraying water on asphalt-paved roads with a pressurized hose only reduced radiation levels by 10 to 50 percent. Shaving the surface of such roads brought levels down by between 10 and 70 percent.

The drainage performance of the roads, along with surface roughness, might be responsible for the differences, ministry officials said.

litate mayor : "We must have the long-term support of the Japanese people"

March 6, 2013

Local mayor seeks long-term support to recover from Fukushima fallout

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130306p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Norio Kanno, mayor of Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture, says his village is struggling to recover from the radioactive fallout caused by the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The nuclear disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami was "a decisive blow to our agriculture industry," Kanno told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) in Tokyo on March 6.

But the mayor said he and residents are hopeful that decontamination work will accelerate to allow the village, about 40 kilometers northwest of the stricken nuclear plant, to pursue options such as building greenhouses to produce farm products safely and boosting its production of flowers.

"We are facing a very tough battle," Kanno said. "But we are determined to continue this battle because we cannot sit by and allow our wonderful hometown and our homeland to be contaminated and destroyed." He also said, "We must have the support of the government and we must have the long-term support of the Japanese people" in order to succeed in the struggle.

Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno meets the press during a news conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) in Tokyo on March 6. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

All of the village's 6,000 residents were ordered to evacuate more than one month after the meltdowns at the nuclear power plant. They have not been allowed to stay overnight in the village to this day. About 500 people work indoors during the daytime and 300 people are involved in crime-prevention patrol duties, the mayor says.

Kanno is an advocate of a "Madei" (genuine hands) lifestyle in which people use both hands to engage in activities with great care. He derides Japan, the United States, Europe and China for placing too much emphasis on economic growth.

"Things are not quite right" in these countries which, in Kanno's view, are pursuing growth at all costs. "Perhaps the nuclear power plant accident can serve as a catalyst to get people thinking more about important issues," he said.

The mayor criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, for refusing to realistically deal with compensation claims by Iitate landowners who have inherited land from their parents and grandparents without written records of ownership.

There is no crisis management policy in place at TEPCO, Kanno says, adding that the giant utility has "a very high-handed arrogant attitude" because it has this pride as a company and believes it is "basically supporting the very foundation of all economic activities in the greater Kanto region." (By Shiro Yoneyama, Staff Writer)

The struggle of marine product processing

March 6, 2013

Marine product processors still struggling to recover after March 11 disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130306p2a00m0na020000c.html>

The marine product processing industry is struggling to make a comeback in coastal areas hit by the devastating March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in spite of government subsidies, with some business starting to go bankrupt.

In a bid to help restore facilities and equipment in the disaster-hit areas, the government has provided "group subsidies" to groups of small- and medium-sized businesses that compile joint business plans and are judged as important in terms of providing employment and supporting the economy. However, a survey by the Tohoku Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry has found that roughly 30 percent of marine product processors are still registering sales under 30 percent of what they were making before the March 2011 disaster.

As a result, businesses have started going bankrupt and closing their doors. It is feared that they could come under further pressure with the expiry of the financing facilitation law, which allows for deferral of loan repayments.

Prefectural government figures show that 4,506 companies in Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures were deemed eligible to receive group subsidies for small- and medium-sized companies. At the end of January, the Tohoku Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry compiled the results of a questionnaire distributed last year to these companies. A total of 67.5 percent of the 3,764 businesses that responded said that their sales were still below the levels seen before the earthquake disaster. The figure rose to 89.5 percent when restricted to companies in the fisheries and food processing industries. Overall, 17 percent of the companies said that their sales had not risen past 30 percent of what they were making before the disaster. Restricted to the fisheries and food processing industries, this figure jumped to 30.8 percent.

"The survey was carried out in autumn last year, but the situation has hardly changed," a representative of the Tohoku bureau said. An official from the Ishinomaki Chamber of Commerce and Industry cautioned, "If the situation continues, more companies will collapse without sufficient funds to repay loans, which could trigger a chain of bankruptcies."

One of the reasons companies have struggled to make a comeback is a **lack of workers**. The questionnaire showed that the overall number of workers had dropped 8.4 percent compared to before the March 2011 disaster. However when confined to the fisheries and food processing industries, this figure rose to 29.3 percent.

Statistics from the Hello Work government employment agency in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, showed that the number of jobs available in the food product manufacturing industry stood at 2.89 times the number of applicants as of January this year -- much higher than the national average of 0.89 across all industries. **It is believed that positions have been left vacant as a result of a greater proportion of women moving inland, and people shying away from work in coastal areas that were hit by the tsunami.**

Companies in the disaster areas have seen **construction expenses** swell as work is delayed amidst a lack of materials. At the same time, the Tohoku bureau maintains that **roughly one-third of companies in the fisheries and food processing industries have no prospects of procuring the funds they need to operate their businesses after they are rebuilt.**

The Small and Medium Enterprise Agency and Miyagi Prefectural Government have established a system to provide low-interest loans to such companies, but in some cases companies seeking loans have been turned down on the basis that they have no ability to repay them, according to one Miyagi Prefectural Government representative.

Subsidies can be used more flexibly

March 8, 2013

Gov't to expand scope of use for disaster recovery subsidies

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130308p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The national government has expanded the scope of use for subsidies that it extends to local governments hit by the March 2011 triple disasters to help with their recovery efforts.

The decision was made at a joint meeting of the Reconstruction Promotion Committee and the Nuclear Disaster Countermeasures Headquarters on March 7 in response to requests by disaster-hit local bodies. "We must speed up recovery efforts and ensure that residents of the disaster-hit areas will enter the next winter, which is the third since the disasters, with some hope. We'd like to do our utmost to make sure that residents of disaster regions will restore their livelihoods," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who heads both organizations, told the meeting.

The disaster recovery subsidy system was established based on the "Act for Special Zone for Reconstruction" that the Diet passed in December 2011. The central government has so far provided a total of about 1.37 trillion yen in reconstruction subsidies to affected local bodies on four occasions since March 2012.

However, local governments in disaster-hit regions have expressed dissatisfaction with the limitation on the scope of their use.

In response, the national government decided at the meeting to enforce the current system in a flexible manner from the fifth provision of such subsidies on March 8 to expand the scope of the subsidies' use. Specifically, the national government has opened the way for municipalities to spend reconstruction subsidies to build parks in areas vacated after residents are collectively relocated to safer areas as well as to establish disaster-prevention centers. Moreover, it now allows local bodies to use such subsidies for surveys to restore sand beaches devastated by powerful tsunami generated by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and build bicycle parking lots in front of railway stations, to help them redevelop the areas.

At the same meeting, the government approved a road map toward building 19,260 public housing units for disaster victims who cannot rebuild their houses on their own in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures by fiscal 2015. By area, 5,094 housing units will be built in Iwate Prefecture, 11,248 in Miyagi Prefecture and 2,918 in Fukushima Prefecture. Additionally, 8,514 housing lots will be developed in the three prefectures for private houses.

Municipalities in disaster regions have drawn up their own plans to build restoration houses. From now on, the Reconstruction Agency will examine whether each municipality has made progress with its construction of restoration houses according to the road map.

The national government will also help facilitate the acquisition of land lots for public disaster restoration housing and secure experts and construction materials.

The government has also compiled a plan to help residents of areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster return to their homes at an early date and settle down in other areas. **It is expected to work out road maps in some areas, where residents will likely be able to return within a few years, by this coming summer.**

We'll never get beaten

March 8, 2013

Evacuated Fukushima farmer pledges not to lose to disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130308p2a00m0na002000c.html>

NAKAJIMA, Fukushima -- Back in April 2011, the month after the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, some 200 residents from the prefectural village of Iitate gathered at a rally before the entire village was evacuated.

With many shedding tears listening to speeches given by fellow villagers on the podium, the rally was concluded with an outcry, saying, "We'll never get beaten!" The slogan encompassed various untold emotions among residents -- fears, sorrow, anger and so forth.

Among the attendants was Takeshi Yamada, 64, a farmer from Iitate. He was forced to leave his farmland behind but took his cows along to the prefectural village of Nakajima, where he and his wife, Yoko, were evacuated.

"I shouldn't return to my village empty-handed sometime in the future," he thought.

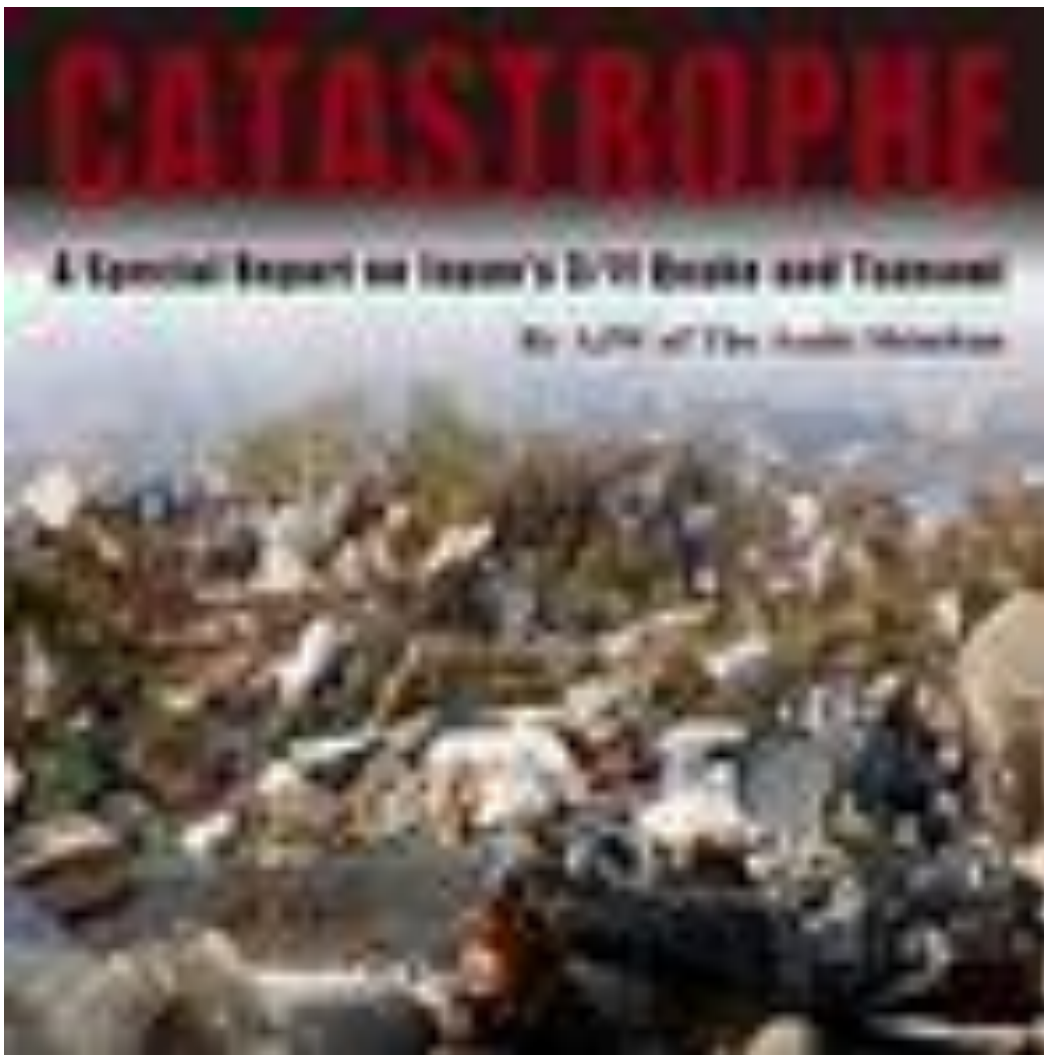
In Nakajima village, Yamada has been breeding Japanese cows by sharing a rented barn with Sadanori Harada, 57, another evacuee from Iitate. Although Nakajima describes himself as "positive," he has mixed emotions when he looks back on the past two years since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, thinking, "It's already been two years" and other times he feels, "It's only been two years."

Two years ago, when radiation deprived people of their lives in their hometowns, he had a phrase he wanted to direct to radiation: "I will never be beaten!" Now, he wants to say those words to himself.

AJW chronicle of 3/11

March 7, 2013

AJW e-book chronicling March 11 disaster available here, free to access



AJW

Two years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan and triggered the unprecedented nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. More than 15,800 people died and more than 2,700 remain unaccounted for. AJW, through our daily coverage over the past two years, has chronicled countless reports of human tragedies, people's efforts to overcome their sorrows and the growing scare of radiation contamination. [Click here to read our e-book.](#)

In this special section to mark the second anniversary of 3/11, we offer this e-book describing what happened during the immediate aftermath of the crisis to provide readers with a glimpse of how the multiple disasters affected the peaceful life of many communities and exposed thousands to radiation risks.

It is our hope that this historic catastrophe will never be forgotten, and most of all, that the lessons learned from it will be shared globally

[The nuclear accident is our biggest problem, say most mayors](#)

March 8, 2013

Mayors of disaster-hit towns bemoan manpower shortages, delayed decontamination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130308p2a00m0na013000c.html>

A Mainichi survey targeting mayors in municipalities heavily affected by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami and the ensuing nuclear disaster has highlighted ongoing problems in the disaster areas.

The Mainichi questioned the mayors of 42 municipalities in three prefectures -- 12 from Iwate Prefecture, 15 from Miyagi and another 15 from Fukushima -- in February as part of an ongoing survey. It received replies from all of the mayors except for the mayor of Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture, whose position was vacant at the time. The vice mayor answered on the mayor's behalf.

Most of the municipalities lie in tsunami-hit coastal areas and evacuation zones set up after the onset of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Thirteen mayors from Fukushima Prefecture, and the mayor of Sendai named the nuclear power plant accident as the biggest cause of trouble in the wake of the March 2011 disaster. Some nine mayors said that the biggest problem was "financial resources" and another seven answered the "limited capacity of municipalities for administration affairs and manpower shortages" as their biggest obstacles.

The mayor of Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture emphasized the town's need to increase manpower, saying "Although the fiscal 2013 general account budget is 14 times larger than the pre-disaster budget, the number of town officials has increased only by 1.5 times."

Some five town mayors cited "securing land for housing" as their biggest hurdles, an increase by two since a survey taken six months ago. Their comments revealed that they are facing a new problem as the reconstruction of houses has sped up.

Out of 15 towns in Fukushima Prefecture that were subject to the survey, 13 mayors answered the nuclear plant accident as their biggest problem. On the progress of decontamination work, five mayors answered that it has been "considerably delayed" compared to the initial decontamination plan and another five said it's been "delayed." Among the reasons for the delays, some answered a lack of decontamination technology and a delay in the preparation for the interim storage of radioactive waste.

On the subject of grants for disaster recovery that the national government announced on March 7 it would reconsider, some 31 town mayors out of 42 answered they were "problematic." Disagreements between the municipalities and the national government have emerged in different cases, such as when the latter turned down a proposal made by the town of Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, requesting a grant to have roads prepared for use in evacuation in times of disasters. Many mayors also expressed their dissatisfaction with the national government's decision to limit the use of the grants to 40 projects among five ministries. "The government could trust us town mayors to make decisions to some extent," said the mayor of Higashi Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture

March 6, 2013

Local mayor seeks long-term support to recover from Fukushima fallout

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130306p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Norio Kanno, mayor of Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture, says his village is struggling to recover from the radioactive fallout caused by the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The nuclear disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami was "a **decisive blow to our agriculture industry**," Kanno told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) in Tokyo on March 6.

But the mayor said he and residents are hopeful that decontamination work will accelerate to allow the village, about 40 kilometers northwest of the stricken nuclear plant, to pursue options such as building greenhouses to produce farm products safely and boosting its production of flowers.

"We are facing a very tough battle," Kanno said. "But we are determined to continue this battle because we cannot sit by and allow our wonderful hometown and our homeland to be contaminated and destroyed." He also said, "We must have the support of the government and we must have the long-term support of the Japanese people" in order to succeed in the struggle.

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Extensions for stores, factories and schools needed in disaster areas

March 7, 2013

Disaster-hit areas to apply for extensions for temporary stores, factories, schools

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130307p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The Miyagi Prefectural Government and the cities of Ishinomaki and Osaki within the prefecture will apply this month for extensions to the length of time that temporary non-residential structures like stores, factories and schools can stay open in areas devastated by tsunami, it has been learned.

Without an extension, the Building Standards Act defines that the temporary structures can only be used for 27 months, which would lead to forced closures at the end of the year, but the extension applications are expected to be accepted.

The extensions would cover at least 100 structures. Meanwhile, the Iwate Prefectural Government is conducting talks with the Reconstruction Agency over extensions for around 170 temporary structures in eight coastal municipalities, and is aiming for an application next month, while the governments of Fukushima Prefecture and the city of Sendai are also collecting municipalities' opinions and preparing to apply. All together, the applications would cover a large number of structures.

The local governments will apply for "special reconstruction zones" to have the extensions approved. These zones were created by a law in December 2011 to help the recovery of disaster-hit areas. Temporary structures can receive yearly permission for continued use when reconstruction is expected to take a long time, and if local construction supervision bodies determine that there are no safety problems. Disaster-hit municipalities are applying for the extensions because of delays in the resumption of business at permanent commercial structures.

The Miyagi Prefectural Government will seek extensions for over 50 structures in Kesenuma, Minamisanriku, Onagawa and other municipalities not covered by local construction supervision bodies. Ishinomaki will seek extensions for 40 to 50 structures in three temporarily-constructed shopping streets, and Osaki will seek extensions for only a few structures. Based on the status of reconstruction work, these governments estimate that extensions will be needed for at most around five years, and they will apply for extensions annually as needed.

According to the Reconstruction Agency, special reconstruction zones with extensions for temporary structures have been granted already for the Ibaraki Prefectural Government and five municipalities in the prefecture, as well as Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture, and Takanezawa in Tochigi Prefecture, but in each case only a few structures were covered.

Two years after disaster (2)

Slow pace of decontamination choking Fukushima

Residents failed by fitful rebuilding

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/11/national/residents-failed-by-fitful-rebuilding/>

by Mizuho Aoki
Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA – *Last in a series*

Two years after thousands of Fukushima residents fled their homes to escape the radiation released by the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, many are gradually returning as more areas are deemed safe.

However, fear of radiation is keeping away most of the younger residents, which means the populations around the plant are fated to become smaller and grayer.

Municipalities are struggling to rebuild amid the radiation stigma.

Last month, 154,148 Fukushima residents were still displaced, with 57,135 outside the prefecture and 97,013 within.

The prefecture had 1,958,054 residents as of Feb. 1, down 3.3 percent from 2,024,401 on March 1, 2011, according to the Fukushima Prefectural Government.

“In these mountainous areas, the population was gradually graying even before (the disasters). But the clock has ticked much faster in the past two years,” said Yuko Endo, the mayor of the village of Kawauchi, part of which is in the 20-km radius of the power plant.

Of the nine municipalities that evacuated in 2011, only two — Kawauchi and Hirono — have opted to reopen so far.

Although Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hailed Kawauchi’s reconstruction efforts last December, calling the village “a front-runner in rebuilding,” the truth is more complicated.

The Kawauchi Municipal Office, an elementary school and a junior high school reopened last April, as did a post office, gas stations, eateries and a convenience store.

And three factories based in Tokyo, Osaka and in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, have opened or plan to open their doors in the village to create jobs.

Meanwhile, the village’s first two municipal apartment buildings are being built and are expected to be ready by the end of this month.

The radiation decontamination work in residential areas is almost complete as well.

But what was once a village of nearly 3,000 people has shrunk to some 420. About 65 percent are over the age of 65, a sharp increase from 34 percent before the disasters struck, the mayor said.

At the village’s only elementary school, student enrollment plunged to 16 in fiscal 2012 from 114 in fiscal 2011.

Headmaster Hitoshi Takashima of Kawauchi Elementary School said the number of students should exceed 20 starting in April, but is unlikely return to three digits.

At the new factories, job openings were still available at the end of February.

“I wonder if people are losing their reason for living in this farming and mountain village. I wonder if they are losing the pride of being born and bred in Kawauchi,” Endo said.

The government will end housing support to evacuees next March. Until then, it’s likely that many villagers won’t return from places where schools, shops and hospitals are more conveniently situated, Endo said.

But what their young people will do when the support runs dry remains to be seen.

The slow pace of decontamination work by the central and local governments is reducing the chances of these communities reviving.

Including Kawauchi and Iitate, decontamination work has begun in only four of the 11 municipalities the central government is responsible for. In the remaining seven, a lack of temporary storage sites is the main cause of the delays.

The environment ministry says that residents near potential storage sites are afraid of radiation. They are also putting up resistance because, since the government has yet to find intermediate storage sites, they doubt assurances that the facilities are temporary, a ministry official said.

One of the areas without a single temporary storage facility is the Odaka district in Minamisoma. Formerly part of the no-go zone, since last April most of the area may now be freely entered in the daytime.

The Odaka Ward Office is scheduled to reopen in April to accelerate the area’s reconstruction, but in late February there were no signs of revitalization in the area.

A former shopping street was utterly empty.

Rusted vehicles lay untouched in a field where tsunami left them, and piles of debris were seen all around.

Kunihiko Yokoyama, 70, whose home in Odaka was destroyed, said many residents returned for a month or so after the ban was lifted to clean their houses and check the state of their hometown. But as time passed, people just stopped coming back, he said.

Asked if he wants to return one day, he sighed and said he didn't know.

"Under the current circumstances, there is no way. Besides, I no longer have a house there," Yokoyama said. "Some seniors hope to live in the area, but I guess the young won't go back there."

Only 2 to 5 percent of Minamisoma's residential areas have been decontaminated, the city office says.

Again, the lack of temporary storage sites is to blame for the slow pace, a city official explained.

"People are surprised to see these views (in Odaka) knowing that almost two years have passed since the disasters," said Sachiko Banba, 52, who runs a cram school in Haramachi in Minamisoma, next to Odaka.

"Some think things have been cleaned up, but they haven't been. . . . I don't want people to think reconstruction has been completed. It's been two years, but the reality is like this."

Domestic violence up

FUKUSHIMA

Jiji

Domestic violence cases are up sharply among couples from areas affected by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis.

With nowhere to escape to in small temporary houses, wives in particular are vulnerable to violent husbands.

It is thought that the pressure created by their indefinite status as evacuees is exacerbating marital troubles.

Japan's cleanup lags from tsunami, nuke accident

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201303110057>

March 11, 2013

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NARAHA, Fukushima Prefecture--Two years after the triple calamities of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster ravaged Japan's northeastern Pacific coast, debris containing asbestos, lead, PCBs--and perhaps most worrying--radioactive waste due to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant looms as a threat for the region.

So far, disposal of debris from the disasters is turning out to have been anything but clean. Workers often lacking property oversight, training or proper equipment have dumped contaminated waste with scant regard for regulations or safety, as organized crime has infiltrated the cleanup process.

Researchers are only beginning to analyze environmental samples for potential health implications from the various toxins swirled in the petri dish of the disaster zone--including dioxins, benzene, cadmium and organic waste-related, said Shoji F. Nakayama of the government-affiliated National Institute for Environmental Studies.

Apart from some inflammatory reactions to some substances in the dust and debris, the longer-term health risks remain unclear, he said.

The mountains of rubble and piles of smashed cars and scooters scattered along the coast only hint at the scale of the debris removed so far from coastlines and river valleys stripped bare by the tsunami. To clear,

sort and process the rubble--and a vastly larger amount of radiation-contaminated soil and other debris near the nuclear plant in Fukushima, the government is relying on big construction companies whose multi-layer subcontracting systems are infiltrated by criminal gangs, or yakuza.

In January, police arrested a senior member of Japan's second-largest yakuza group, Sumiyoshi Kai, on suspicion of illegally dispatching three contract workers to Date, a city in Fukushima struggling with relatively high radioactive contamination, through another construction company and pocketing one-third of their pay.

He told interrogators he came up with the plot to "make money out of clean-up projects" because the daily pay for such government projects, at 15,000-17,000 yen (\$160-\$180), was far higher than for other construction jobs, said police spokesman Hiraku Hasumi.

Gangsters have long been involved in industrial waste handling, and police say they suspect gangsters are systematically targeting reconstruction projects, swindling money from low-interest lending schemes for disaster-hit residents and illegally mobilizing construction and clean-up workers.

Meanwhile, workers complain of docked pay, unpaid hazard allowances--which should be 10,000 yen, or \$110, a day--and of inadequate safety equipment and training for handling the hazardous waste they are clearing from towns, shores and forests after meltdowns of three nuclear reactor cores at Fukushima No. 1 plant released radiation into the surrounding air, soil and ocean.

"We are only part of a widespread problem," said a 56-year-old cleanup worker, who asked to be identified only by his last name, Nakamura, out of fear of retaliation. "Everyone, from bureaucrats to construction giants to tattooed gangsters, is trying to prey on decontamination projects. And the government is looking the other way."

During a recent visit to Naraha, a deserted town of 8,000 that is now a weedy no-man's land within the 20-kilometer (12-mile) restricted zone around the crippled nuclear plant, workers wearing regular work clothes and surgical masks were scraping away topsoil, chopping tree branches and washing down roofs. "They told me only how to cut grass, but nothing about radiation," said Munenori Kagaya, 59, who worked in the nearby town of Tomioka, which is off-limits due to high radiation.

Naraha's mayor, Yukiei Matsumoto, said that early on, he and other local officials were worried over improper handling of the 1.5 trillion yen (\$16 billion) cleanup, but refrained from raising the issue, until public allegations of dozens of instances of mishandling of radioactive waste prompted an investigation by the Environment Ministry, which is handling decontamination of the 11 worst-affected towns and villages. "I want them to remind them again what the cleanup is for," Matsumoto said in an interview. "Its purpose is to improve the environment so that people can safely return to live here. It's not just to meet a deadline and get it over with."

The ministry said it found only five questionable cases, though it acknowledged a need for better oversight. Another probe, by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry found rampant labor violations--inadequate education and protection from radiation exposure, a lack of medical checks and unpaid salaries and hazard pay--at nearly half the cleanup operations in Fukushima.

About half of the 242 contractors involved were reprimanded for violations, the ministry said.

An Environment Ministry official in charge of decontamination said the government has little choice but to rely on big contractors, and to give them enough leeway to get the work done.

"We have to admit that only the major construction companies have the technology and manpower to do such large-scale government projects," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, citing the sensitivity of the issue. "If cleanup projects are overseen too strictly, it will most likely cause further delays and labor shortages."

Minoru Hara, deputy manager at a temporary waste storage site in Naraha, defended the 3,000 workers doing the work--the only people allowed to stay in the town.

"Most of the cleanup workers are working sincerely and hard," Hara said. "They are doing a good job of washing down houses and cleaning up gardens. Such criticism is really unfair, and bad for morale."

Labor shortages, lax oversight and massive amounts of funds budgeted for the clean-up are a recipe for cheating. And plenty of money is at stake: the cleanup of a 20-kilometer (12-mile) segment of an expressway whose worst contamination exceeds allowable radiation limits by 10 times will cost 2.1 billion yen (\$22.5 billion), said Yoshinari Yoshida, an Environment Ministry official.

"While decontamination is a must, the government is bearing the burden. We have to consider the cost factor," said deputy Environment Minister Shinji Inoue as he watched workers pressure wash the road's surface, a process Yoshida said was expected to reduce contamination by half.

The cleanup is bound to overrun its budget by several times, as delays deepen due to a lack of long-term storage options as opposition among local residents in many areas hardens. It will leave Fukushima, whose huge farm and fisheries industry has been walloped by radiation fears, with 31 million tons of nuclear waste or more. Around Naraha, huge temporary dumps of radioactive waste, many football fields in size and stacked two huge bags deep, are scattered around the disaster zone

The cleanups extend beyond Fukushima Prefecture, to Iwate Prefecture in the north and Chiba Prefecture, which neighbors Tokyo, in the south. And the concerns are not limited to radiation. A walk through areas in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures that already were cleared of debris finds plenty of toxic detritus, such as batteries from cell phones, electrical wiring, plastic piping and gas canisters.

Japan has the technology to safely burn up most toxins at very high temperatures, with minimal emissions of PCBs, mercury and other poisons. But mounds of wood chips in a seaside processing area near Kesenuma were emitting smoke into the air one recent winter afternoon, possibly from spontaneous combustion.

Workers at that site had high-grade gas masks, an improvement from the early days, when many working in the disaster zone had only surgical masks, at most, to protect them from contaminated dust and smoke.

Overall, how well the debris and contaminants are being handled depends largely on the location.

Sendai, the biggest city in the region, sorted debris as it was collected and sealed the surfaces of areas used to store debris for processing to protect the groundwater, thanks to technical advice from its sister-city Kyoto, home to many experts who advised the government in its cleanup of the 1995 earthquake in the Kobe-Osaka area that killed more than 6,400 people.

But Ishinomaki, a city of more than 160,000, collected its debris first and is only gradually sorting and processing it, said the U.S.-educated Nakayama, who worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency before returning to Japan.

"There were no technical experts there for the waste management side," he said. "They did some good work with chemical monitoring but in total, risk assessment, risk management, unfortunately they did not have that expertise."

Ultimately, just as they are choosing to live with contamination from chemicals and other toxins, the authorities may have to reconsider their determination to completely clean up the radiation, given the effort's cost and limited effectiveness, experts say.

Regarding the nuclear accident, "there has been so much emphasis on decontamination that no other options were considered," said Hiroshi Suzuki, a professor emeritus at Tohoku University in Sendai and chairman of the Fukushima Prefectural Reconstruction Committee.

Some places, such as playgrounds, obviously must be cleaned up. But others, such as forests, should just be left alone, since gathering or burning radioactive materials concentrates them--the opposite of what is needed since the more diluted they are, the better.

To a certain extent, policy is being dictated by politics, said Suzuki.

Before the accident, residents believed they were completely safe, he said. "The authorities want to be able to tell them once again that the area is safe. To do this they need to return it to the state that it was in before the accident."

Naraha resident Yoshimasa Murakami, a 79-year-old farmer, said he has low expectations.

A month after the government started cleaning his spacious home he has not seen a major decrease in radiation, he said while sitting on a balcony overlooking his traditional Japanese garden.

He set a dosimeter on the grass. It measured radiation nearly five times the target level and almost the same as the 1.09 microsieverts per hour found when officials surveyed it in December.

Murakami had come to the house for the day. He, his wife and daughter now live 50 kilometers (30 miles) away in Koriyama city.

He visits a few times a week to keep an eye on the cleanup workers. At nearly 80, Murakami says he doesn't mind about the radiation, but his wife does. And if he returns, his other relatives and grandchildren will be afraid to visit.

"Then, what's the point?" he said.

"I don't think decontamination is going to work," Murakami said. "The nuclear crisis is not fully over, and you never know, something still can go wrong."

Two years after disaster (1)

March 7, 2013

Cleanup work progresses in Fukushima, but residents still concerned

By SHUNSUKE KIMURA/ Staff Writer

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303070075>

FUKUSHIMA--For a problem caused by such advanced technology, the solution sounds decidedly low-tech.

Work to decontaminate areas awash with radioactive materials spewed from the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant two years ago generally centers on mowing grass, removing topsoil and wiping the roofs of homes with rags.

In the mountainous Onami district of Fukushima, some 56 kilometers from the crippled facility, radiation levels have come down sharply after cleanup crews had been through.

Some 470 homes in the district have been decontaminated to date, but that does not mean that residents' concerns have been allayed.

"Generally, people are reasonably satisfied, certainly to some extent," says Toshimichi Sato, 62, chief of a residents' association in the Onami district. "But they are not totally satisfied, either. The fact is, radiation is still a big problem that haunts us two years after the disaster."

The central government plans to complete the mammoth task of decontamination in highly contaminated areas in 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture by March 2014, excluding forests. Local governments are responsible for other areas.

Full-scale decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture first got under way in the Onami district in October 2011, seven months after the onset of the crisis.

On the first day that work started, then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda visited the district for an on-site inspection.

Given the lack of knowledge in how to remove radioactive materials efficiently, cleanup workers initially concentrated on washing tiles on roofs and collecting mud in gutters.

The work progressed fairly smoothly in Onami because a storage site for the contaminated soil was secured early on.

According to the Fukushima city government, the average radiation level measured at the entrances of 109 homes in the Onami district was 0.8 microsievert per hour in February 2012.

The figure is half of what it was before the decontamination work started, but many residents are keen for additional decontamination work to be carried out.

"Everyone is agonizing day after day," Sato says. "But if we give up, that will be the end of it. We will ask the government (to take further measures).

"We are not hoping they will create a brand new community. All we want is to return our Onami district to what it was before the disaster."

On a chilly day in late February, 62-year-old Yoshiharu Suda surveyed his snow-covered garden in Onami. The garden used to have more than 30 trees. Most were removed as part of decontamination work. Among the few exceptions is a persimmon tree that had been planted by Suda's mother as a housewarming present.

"My mother says the tree is bearing fruit," Suda says, examining the blackish persimmons that are left on the tree. The fruit is normally orange-red in color. "But I told her we cannot eat them."

Replacing topsoil with new dirt brought the radiation level at his house and garden down from 2.9 microsieverts per hour to 0.7 microsievert.

Suda says the radiation level is currently around 0.4 microsievert, but he is worried that it may rise.

"I'm scared that (the radiation level) may rise when the snow melts," he says. "But we probably have no choice but to keep on living here."

According to the Environment Ministry, the success of decontamination work varies depending on where the work is carried out and which procedures are employed.

A ministry survey found radiation levels of gutters, street runoffs and entrances to storm drains fell by 60 to 90 percent by first removing mud and wiping the surfaces or using high-pressure hoses.

Tests on various types of roof surfaces resulted in different levels of effectiveness.

Radiation levels on commonplace roofs were slashed by 20 to 60 percent, but decontamination work had only a limited effect on roofs made of cement tiles, mat clay tiles and painted steel sheets.

The ministry said the surface roughness, rust and other factors might compromise the effectiveness of decontamination work.

Removing topsoil at depths of between 3 and 5 centimeters reduced radiation levels by 40 to 80 percent. Radiation levels also dropped by 70 to 90 percent when surface grass was removed.

Decontamination work on asphalt or concrete-paved parking lots nearly halved radiation levels.

But spraying water on asphalt-paved roads with a pressurized hose only reduced radiation levels by 10 to 50 percent. Shaving the surface of such roads brought levels down by between 10 and 70 percent.

The drainage performance of the roads, along with surface roughness, might be responsible for the differences, ministry officials said.

Ma

People worried about radioactivity in their food

Survey: 30% worry about radioactive substances in food production areas

March 12, 2013

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201303120083

Nearly 30 percent of Japanese consumers check production locations to avoid food possibly contaminated by radioactive substances, while 19 percent are reluctant to buy food products from Fukushima

Prefecture, a government survey showed.

The Consumer Affairs Agency's online survey, conducted in the middle of February, covered people living in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, the three prefectures hardest hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, as well as in the densely populated areas in and around Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya.

The survey was conducted to counter negative publicity about food in the Tohoku region in light of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. About 5,000 people responded.

The agency asked: "Are you concerned about the production area when buying food?"

Some 68 percent of the respondents said "I am" or "I am to some extent."

Among them, 41 percent--or 28 percent of all respondents--said the reason for their concern is: "I want to buy food uncontaminated by radioactive materials."

Nineteen percent of all respondents avoid food from Fukushima Prefecture, while 15 percent are hesitant to buy food products from the three heavily hit prefectures, according to the survey.

Four percent said they try not to buy food from any area of eastern Japan.

The survey also revealed a lack of knowledge about tests conducted for radioactive substances to ensure food is safe to consume.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents said, "I did not know such tests have been carried out."

Government lender says more people eager to buy food from radiation-tainted areas

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/12/national/government-lender-says-more-people-eager-to-buy-food-from-radiation-tainted-areas/#.UT71qjdD-jQ>

More people are willing to buy fresh food produced in areas endangered by the Fukushima nuclear crisis, an online survey by a government-owned lender said Monday.

The survey was conducted by Japan Finance Corp., a policy-based lender owned by the Japanese government.

According to JFC's website, its Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Food Business Unit had ¥2.63 trillion in loans outstanding to such businesses as of March 31, 2012.

JFC's finding was based on a difference of 0.2 in the ratio of respondents who don't buy at-risk food (31.8 percent) and those who say they do or aren't concerned about the impact of radiation on food (32 percent), the survey shows. No margin of error was given.

It is the first time since the Fukushima crisis began that the former figure, logged in January 2012, has been eclipsed, the survey said.

The portion of those who buy such food or don't care about the impact of radiation rose 2.0 points compared with the previous survey, while the portion of those who avoid such food fell 6.0 points, the survey said.

"Two years after the disaster, wariness about safety is receding gradually," a Japan Finance official said. Of those respondents willing to buy at-risk food, 38.3 percent said there were no safety problems, up 6.4 points from the previous survey.

Those who hope to support disaster-hit areas came to 27.8 percent, up 5.8 points.

The survey, conducted in January, logged 2,000 valid responses.

JFC employs more than 7,460 people, its website says.

Abe promises roadmap for evacuee return by summer

March 12, 2013

Road map for Fukushima evacuees due in summer: Abe

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/12/national/road-map-for-fukushima-evacuees-due-in-summer-abe/#.UT71WDdD-jQ>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Monday he has plans to unveil a road map this summer on promoting infrastructure-building to allow nuclear evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture to return as early as possible. "There is a need to create an environment in which each disaster-affected person can visualize when and how the reconstruction will progress," Abe told a press conference on the second anniversary of the disaster that devastated the northeast coastline and triggered the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl.

The road map is intended to provide a time frame for when infrastructure, such as power lines and roads, will be restored and when medical and nursing facilities will be ready for resume operation in disaster-hit areas in Fukushima, Abe said.

Abe also said the government is hoping to start transporting soil and waste contaminated by the Fukushima crisis to a temporary storage facility starting in January 2015.

The government has proposed setting up such a facility somewhere near the Fukushima plant, but none of the municipalities approached has agreed to host it.

Abe said the government will conduct more research on candidate sites from March to May before designating a host.

In another step to speed up reconstruction, Abe said the government will "boldly simplify" procedures for relocating buildings and houses to higher ground to shield residents from future tsunami, citing the easing of a procedure to purchase farmland as an example.

He said **the government will promote new, competitive industries in the quake-hit Tohoku region to stimulate Japan's economic growth.** He specifically eyes setting up research and development facilities for wind power and medical equipment.

"I want to establish industries in the fields where we can address difficulties facing Japan and expand their business abroad," Abe said.

While domestic utilities have boosted thermal power generation and consequently increased natural gas imports, **Abe said Japan wants to diversify its energy sources in a way that will help reduce costs, possibly by importing shale gas.**

Museum on 3/11 to open near Fukushima

March 15, 2013

Museum about Fukushima nuclear accident to open in May

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303150014>

By KUNIO OZAWA/ Staff Writer

SHIRAKAWA, Fukushima Prefecture--A nonprofit organization is building a museum about Japan's worst nuclear accident at a site located around 80 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The plans call for opening the Fukushima nuclear disaster information center on May 19 within the grounds of the Auschwitz Peace Museum Japan, which is operated by the same NPO.

"Unless we transmit information from Fukushima, which was at the very center of the nuclear accident, people will forget about it," Mari Obuchi, 56, the museum head, said.

Group members said they hope the Fukushima facility will eventually play a role similar to the peace museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki that have exhibitions about the devastation caused by the atomic bombings in August 1945.

The Auschwitz Peace Museum opened in 2003 in Shirakawa and displays belongings of victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers as well as photos borrowed from a Polish national museum.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster information center will be a wooden structure of about 200 square meters. Electricity will be generated through solar power.

At first, documents related to radiation borrowed from environmental protection and peace groups in the Tokyo metropolitan area and elsewhere will be displayed. The Fukushima center also plans to show a list of areas of low radiation where Fukushima Prefecture children can visit during weekends.

The NPO also plans to work together with the Kyoto Museum for World Peace of Ritsumeikan University for special exhibitions.

NPO officials are seeking donations of 100 million yen (\$1.05 million) for construction costs and initial operating expenses. The phone number of the Auschwitz Peace Museum is +81-(0)248-28-2108.

Futaba and Okuma still deserted

March 13, 2013

Empty streets, menacing crows and little hope in towns co-hosting Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303130081>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--Hiroyuki Endo walks down a street lined with shuttered shops and withered weeds and solemnly gazes at a sign overhead.

"Nuclear power, energy for a bright future," the sign reads. On the reverse side are the words: "Nuclear power, for a rich life on correct understanding."

"This signboard has become famous since the accident," Endo said. "I didn't care a bit about it before the accident."

The town of Futaba remains deserted two years after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The situation is similar in Okuma, the other town that co-hosts the crippled plant.

More than 150,000 people in Fukushima Prefecture are still living away from their homes since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated the northeastern coast of Japan on March 11, 2011. They include all 7,000 residents of Futaba who are now scattered across the nation because of high radiation levels caused by the nuclear accident.

Some evacuees, including Endo, returned briefly to their homes in Futaba and Okuma in early March.

In Futaba, quake-damaged wooden houses had collapsed on the streets.

Rust had formed on the pro-nuclear sign, which was installed in the 1980s with a subsidy from the central government.

"Every time I come back, I feel the town has lost its color," Endo, 47, said. "It will further deteriorate as time passes."

A dosimeter in a car kept beeping after detecting radiation exceeding 1 microsievert per hour, showing that the levels in Futaba are still high.

The town is in a designated no-entry zone. Most parts of Futaba are expected to be reclassified as difficult-to-return zones, with annual radiation doses of more than 50 millisieverts.

Abandoned factories and office buildings stand on the ground of the Futaba industrial park, a possible site for an intermediate storage facility for radioactive soil collected in the decontamination process.

"The facility will probably be built after all these buildings are destroyed," Endo said. "It will be easy to build the facility because this is higher ground."

The exhaust stacks of the Fukushima No. 1 plant could be seen from Endo's home, 2 kilometers northwest of the plant and near the industrial park.

"What can they do with these?" Endo asked, looking at the many rocks he had placed in his Japanese garden.

He said he had no idea if he will receive compensation for the garden rocks and trees he had purchased.

In a shed outside Endo's house, barrels glistened in the light, apparently having been licked by cows left behind after the accident. His plastic greenhouse smelled like a cowshed.

Endo was born and raised in Futaba. He did maintenance work at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant but quit shortly before the meltdowns.

When he was about to start a new job, the accident occurred, forcing Endo and other townspeople to evacuate to Kawamata in the same prefecture.

Endo and his family later moved to Kagoshima Prefecture where an acquaintance lives.

He returned alone and worked amid the radioactive debris from the hydrogen explosions that rocked the Fukushima No. 1 plant in the early stages of the disaster.

"Looking at the buildings that had been blown apart by the explosions, I could only think, 'Oh, no!'" he recalled.

He worked at the plant until June 2011.

One purpose of his latest visit to Futaba was to take photos of his daughter's "hina" girls' festival dolls, which he bought to celebrate her birth 15 years ago.

Endo picked up a large doll from a closet in a tatami-matted room.

Asked if he would bring the doll to his current residence, he muttered to himself: "How can I possibly do that? There is no room for this doll in our apartment in Kagoshima."

He says he has little hope of returning permanently to his home, considering that the half-life of radioactive cesium-137 is about 30 years.

"It is too long. I doubt if I could see the end (of the crisis) while I am alive," he said.

In Okuma, Kumika Takeuchi looked up at the many crows flying above a shopping district on March 10.

"I have no idea when they increased in number," she said.

The 52-year-old returned with her husband, Kazushi Takeuchi, 59. The Takeuchi family ran a coffee shop in the town before they and the 11,500 other residents were forced to evacuate.

Tomomi, their 26-year-old daughter, showed the way to a grocery store next to the coffee shop. The glass on the entrance door was smeared white with bird droppings, making it difficult to see inside.

As we moved closer, rancid odor from rotten food filled the air, and a crow suddenly flew out through a narrow opening in the damaged entrance.

Tomomi screamed. Around five more crows then smashed into the glass as they tried to make their escape.

At Futaba Shoyo High School, where Tomomi had attended, at least 100 crows were roosting in branches of a 50-meter line of trees.

"I feel like I'm watching a horror movie," Tomomi said. "I did not know that a place would become like this after the people are gone."

At the Takeuchis' home, where the coffee shop was located, Kumika sighed at the sight of rodent droppings that left little room to step.

Mice had gnawed a 30-centimeter line on the stairs.

"When we were here last autumn, it just smelled musty," she said.

As Kazushi offered incense sticks at the gravesite of the family's ancestors, he said, "Now, the only purpose of a visit home is to pay respect to our ancestors."

(This article was compiled from reports by Shunsuke Kimura and Noriyoshi Otsuki.)

March 11, 2013

OKUMA: Town that co-hosts Fukushima plant remains deserted

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303110114>

By TAKAYUKI KIHARA/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Withered weeds cover the yard of Kumamachi Elementary School, while satchels, dictionaries, calligraphy tools, keyboard harmonicas and handmade bags for gym uniforms lay abandoned inside the darkened classrooms.

There are no children at the school. They haven't been here since they fled during the aftershocks on March 11, 2011, leaving their belongings behind.

The school is 4 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which straddles the towns of Okuma and Futaba.

All residents left Okuma on the day after the disaster. It is not known when they can return.

About the only consistent activity evident in Okuma now are workers in protective clothing trying to decontaminate the town.

At some locations, the radiation level measures 50 microsieverts per hour, lower than the figure soon after the accident but still more than 10 times the government standard for evacuation.

In January, the town government set up devices at 15 locations to measure radioactive substances released from the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

"Even if we remove accumulated radioactive substances, it could become meaningless if new ones fall," a town employee told The Asahi Shimbun. "We need to know what is happening without relying on information from the government and (plant operator) Tokyo Electric Power Co."

Decontamination work started in a 28-hectare area of rice paddies in southwestern Okuma at the end of last year because radiation levels there are relatively low.

About 200 workers in protective clothing now remove potentially contaminated soil and vegetation and stuff them in black bags that have piled up throughout the area.

Initial plans called for removing topsoil 5 cm from the surface of the rice paddies. The depth was revised to 10 cm because radiation levels did not drop sufficiently.

The government plans to complete decontamination of the area by March next year. But that area was home to only 4 percent of town residents, and it is unclear when the cleanup will be completed in all other areas of the town.

The government plans to build an intermediate storage facility for soil collected in the decontamination work around the Fukushima No. 1 plant in an area encompassing Okuma, Futaba and Naraha towns.

In one possible candidate site, many homes, separated from the Fukushima nuclear plant by low forests, could be seen from a hill in Okuma.

A 17-km section of the Joban Expressway, which runs through the coastal area of Fukushima Prefecture, remains closed due to earthquake damage.

East Nippon Expressway Co. plans to reopen the section between the Hirono Interchange and the Joban-Tomioka Interchange by March 2014.

Large-scale restoration work is required at 13 locations along the section, according to the company.

About 10 people in protective clothing were working near the Hirono Interchange when an Asahi Shimbun reporter visited the site on March 7.

Radiation levels along the section range from 3.8 microsieverts per hour to 9.5 microsieverts per hour.

The Environment Ministry is decontaminating the area to lower radiation levels to at least 3.8 microsieverts per hour before the section reopens.
(Takemichi Nishibori contributed to this article.)

Japan helps Canada get rid of debris

March 15, 2013

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130314004584.htm>

Govt funds Canada's disposal of debris

Jiji Press

The government has given about 1 million Canadian dollars (93.5 million yen) to Canada to help finance the disposal of debris washing up on its Pacific coast after the March 2011 tsunami, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday.

The government has already provided 5 million dollars to the United States to help with the cleanup of tsunami debris.

March 14, 2013

Japan gives Canada \$1m for tsunami cleanup

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130314_18.html

The Japanese government will provide one million dollars to Canada to help authorities clean up debris that is washing ashore from the 2011 tsunami.

Japan's Vancouver Consul General Seiji Okada and Canadian Environmental Minister Peter Kent announced the deal on Wednesday in Vancouver.

An estimated 1.5 million tons of debris from the March 11th quake and tsunami is floating in the Pacific Ocean. Some of the wreckage has already reached the coast of North America.

Among the debris to hit Canada's west coast is a motorbike from Miyagi. Styrene foam products and fishing buoys have also been found.

Officials from Canada's central government and the province of British Columbia will discuss how to use the money.

The Japanese government decided last September to provide funds to the US and Canada to help them clear the tsunami debris. Five million dollars have been provided to the US.

The sense of loss of evacuees

March 15, 2013

Fukushima evacuees ask lawmakers for more assistance

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303150083>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A handful of evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant crisis gathered on March 14 in Tokyo and called on the central government to do more to help children and others displaced by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

The hearing at the Upper House members' office building in Nagatacho was organized by a cross-partisan group of lawmakers, lawyers and activists who argue that **the law enacted in June to assist the victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster is merely an expression of ideals and contains no effective punch.**

Chika Shishido, who evacuated from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to Sapporo, said she organized a group of unmarried women, including herself, who were caught in a "sense of loss."

"The government did not defend us," the 29-year-old said.

Shishido said that care should be carefully provided to disaster survivors on an individual basis according to their different circumstances of life. Some of them may have lost loved ones to the tsunami, she said, while others may be raising their children amid high radiation levels.

Sachiko Sawagami, who was forced to leave her home in an exclusion zone in Futaba to Matsuyama, called for assistance to those who evacuated, unlike herself, on a voluntary basis.

"They are questioning and agonizing over their decisions (to leave), which they reached after giving it a lot of thought," Sawagami, 37, said. "The borderline drawn by the government is deepening a divide."

Tomoko Furuyama said she commutes to a company in Fukushima Prefecture from Shiroishi in neighboring Miyagi Prefecture, where she raises her three children. She said that after the onset of the nuclear disaster she set up an advocacy group in her community to protect children. The group has been measuring radiation levels on an independent basis. Furuyama, 40, said radiation levels remain high in some locations.

"Measures should be taken on the basis of actual radiation levels and real-life circumstances," she said.

"We farmers should raise our voices..."

March 11, 2013

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/movie/feature201303112005.html>

Hoping for a harvest

About rice farmers in the Odaka district (Minamisoma)

Problems for guarantors

March 16, 2013

Property tied up as collateral for acquaintances affecting quake recovery

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130316p2a00m0na007000c.html>

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate -- As the possibility of outlawing third-party loan guarantors comes under consideration by lawmakers, the situation of a man here whose property is trapped as collateral shows evidence of how such loans are affecting quake recovery.

The 83-year-old man here lost his home that he was born and raised in to tsunami on the day of the Great East Japan Earthquake, but an agreement he made around 20 years ago to be a guarantor for an acquaintance is preventing him from rebuilding.

In 1992, the man was contacted for help by someone he had been classmates with in elementary and junior high school. That acquaintance's son was going to borrow 100 million yen from the JA

Rikuzentakata agricultural cooperative to set up a dental clinic, and the acquaintance wanted the man to guarantee the loan.

The man tried to refuse, but he gave in when the acquaintance said he had no one else to turn to. No one from the agricultural cooperative was there when the man signed the papers, and he did not get an explanation of the risks he was taking.

Later, the man noticed that amongst the papers he signed was an agreement putting all of his assets as collateral for the loan. He kept the agreement secret from his family at first, but he had to reveal it when his family started talking about taking down their house and building a new one, because they could not do so while the house was collateral.

Some years later, the man heard that the acquaintance's son's dental clinic was not doing well, and later the acquaintance and his son filed for bankruptcy. The man had to give piece after piece of property to the agricultural cooperative to pay off the debt, and he still owes almost 70 million yen.

An employee at the agricultural cooperative who works with loans said, "I don't know the details of this man's case, but in the past it was common to make joint guarantors out of acquaintances. There were times when people with poor credit would bring joint guarantors with them so they could pass screening."

Meanwhile, the acquaintance's wife says, "We feel sorry (for the man who became a joint guarantor), but there's nothing we can do. Things have been hard for us, too."

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the man has faced a new problem. Although his land is subject to mass relocation and the city government is willing to pay 9 million yen for it, he has heard that the local government will not buy collateral. The problems have caused trouble for his son and the son's wife, too, and worried about the future, the man has been using sleep drugs.

Financial institutions have long depended on loan guarantors, and especially in rural areas where communities are tight-knit, it is difficult for people to refuse each other's requests to become such guarantors. Lawyer Fumiyasu Zaima, who the man has sought help from, says, "There are many people who are suffering after being unable to refuse becoming guarantors. **This is not a problem of individuals, but of the system.**" He says that the government needs to come up with ways to help people who are currently acting as guarantors.

It is not only joint guarantors who are faced with debt problems. Half a year after the earthquake, an 83-year-old woman in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, had a problem when she learned that financial institutions

were demanding payment from relatives and acquaintances acting as guarantors for loans for her husband's food product business. Her husband's dementia symptoms worsened after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and they laid off their employees. When the woman looked into the financial records, she found they were 1.4 million yen in debt, not counting interest.

After discussing things with the financial institutions, the woman was able to pay off the debt using disaster relief money. Still, with the husband hospitalized and their house lost in the disaster, things remain difficult for the family.

Don't rely on disaster maps, nor on authorities

INTERVIEW/ Toshitaka Katada: Don't trust hazard maps and don't depend on authorities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/opinion/AJ201303200038>

By TAIRIKU KUROSAWA/ Senior Staff Writer

Although central and local governments have been upgrading their disaster damage projections and crisis management plans, Toshitaka Katada, professor at Gunma University, questions the usefulness of their disaster maps.

Katada said much more can be learned from the "Miracle of Kamaishi," in which children ignored hazard maps and led other youngsters and adults to safety after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck two years ago on March 11, 2011.

The professor says lessons in "attitude education" can also save lives in catastrophes.

Excerpts from his recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun follow:

* * *

Question: Isn't it necessary to project disaster damage and prepare hazard maps in anticipation of future catastrophes?

Toshitaka Katada: I'll be blunt. You shouldn't trust hazard maps. This is not to say that damage projections are useless. What I mean is that it's a big mistake to believe the maps will save your life.

Even if you follow a map faithfully and flee to a zone that's designated safe, you still could end up dead. That's because natural disasters sometimes defy predictions.

Q: But don't we all need to have some idea of where to flee?

A: The problem lies in our excessive dependence on administrative authorities. We expect them to create maps that show all the dangerous places to stay away from.

I don't mean to side with the authorities, but I keep thinking that the root of the problem lies in our society's tendency to hold the authorities accountable for a lot of things, including disaster prevention. But when it comes to protecting your own life, you can't and shouldn't expect someone else to do it for you. It's your own responsibility.

Q: Would children understand that?

A: Since 2004, I have visited the city of Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture many times to educate children in disaster prevention. One time, I showed them a hazard map of areas prone to flooding. Their immediate reaction was to see whose homes were in safe areas and whose weren't.

To the kids whose homes were in safe areas, I asked, "Are you sure you are really safe?" I went on to explain that the hazard map was based on the results of the Meiji-Sanriku Tsunami of 1896.

I then asked them, "When the next tsunami strikes, do you really think the results will still be the same?" That got them thinking about areas that were designated safe on the map but could be dangerous.

We've got to teach children to think and act on their own by asking them questions and encouraging them to come up with their own answers. This is what I call an "attitude education" in disaster prevention.

The Japanese education system emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge. This tends to produce people who have knowledge but are passive thinkers. If you tell these people to evacuate when an evacuation order is issued, they will interpret it to mean that they don't have to evacuate unless there is an evacuation order. Knowledge is useful only if you know how to act on it.

Q: That's rather abstract and difficult to explain to people, isn't it?

A: We teach children to raise their hand when they cross a street, but we ourselves don't do it. We are merely teaching them a formality, and we must stop going by the manual when we educate children.

But no matter how clumsy we may be as teachers, I believe children will sense our genuine concern for their safety if we speak to them in a way they can understand. This is what I mean by teaching an attitude, and that's different from teaching them knowledge.

YOU MUST FORCE YOURSELF TO FLEE

Q: It's difficult to decide whether to flee.

A: What I always tell the kids is this: People will think you are a chicken if you are the first to flee, but you've got to muster up the courage to do it. If you flee, I say to them, other people will also start fleeing, and their lives will be saved as a result.

In Kamaishi, this is exactly what the children did, and many adults were saved because they followed the kids' lead.

I believe disaster management is about knowing disaster risks and yourself and controlling your own actions. It's your own self you must know better than your enemy. But people tend to want to take the easy way out. They make excuses for not fleeing by thinking they'll be all right because they were all right the last time they didn't flee.

This is called "normalcy bias" in social psychology. But you must snap out of this mental state and force yourself to flee.

Q: "Tsunami tendenko" is an old Japanese expression meaning that when a tsunami strikes, everyone should flee immediately and not even wait for their family members.

A: We must understand the real meaning of this expression. It cannot possibly mean that parents should abandon their children and vice versa. I believe the expression teaches the importance of establishing a solid relationship of mutual trust that enables all family members to believe that everyone will flee to safety.

For instance, if you are a parent and your child is at school, you trust your child to flee on his or her own without waiting for you to come and pick him or her up. Of course, this presupposes the existence of mutual trust between you and the school. I may be interpreting the meaning of "tsunami tendenko" a bit too liberally. But I intend to stick to it because I think this is what our forebears must have meant by "tsunami tendenko."

When people are unable to reach their loved ones during a disaster, they should do their best to cope with the situation they face. This way, they can maximize their chance of being eventually reunited with their loved ones. People should act the same way in the event of flooding and large-scale fires.

Problems occur for people who are unable to go home after a major disaster when they are worried sick about their families and try to get home at all costs. This goes against the meaning of "tsunami tendenko."

Q: Tsunami disaster projections keep getting worse and worse. How should we cope?

A: Because the March 11 tsunami was of an unanticipated scale, the recent trend to revise disaster projections upward seems to me like an attempt by the authorities to avoid being accused later of being unprepared. A tsunami of that magnitude is something that could occur once in a millennium, right? But the disaster projections we are now seeing don't really tell us if and when the next killer tsunami will strike.

So I think we'd be wise to focus on how we can live our lives happily and in peace. After all, a tsunami isn't the only thing that can kill us. There are car accidents and even meteors, too.

In the city of Owase in Mie Prefecture, I came across an 80-year-old man who was terrified by the new disaster projections he saw. I told him that those projections were about a very rare catastrophe, and that he most likely won't be around if and when it does strike. He beamed happily when he heard that.

Recently, a tsunami warning kept children at school until midnight. We just can't keep overreacting all the time.

Q: It appears that changing the awareness of adults is more difficult than changing the awareness of children, don't you think?

A: When a mishap occurs at a company, the company creates a manual to prevent a recurrence. If another mishap occurs, the company creates yet another manual. As it goes on like that, the company's stack of manuals keeps getting higher.

But recently, companies have apparently begun to realize that no manual can really help them cope with unforeseen situations. I've been receiving more requests to give talks at companies. They seem to want me to explain the sort of educational process I've been using for children in Kamaishi, so they can learn to train themselves to make their own decisions flexibly.

Our society certainly needs to snap out of its excessive dependence on authorities.

Toshitaka Katada, 52, is a professor at Gunma University's Faculty of Engineering. He completed a doctoral program at the graduate school of Toyohashi University of Technology in 1990. He took his current post in 2005 and has served on various disaster prevention committees of the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

His published works include "Hito ga Shinanai Bosai" (Zero-death disaster prevention), "Kodomotachi ni Ikinuku Chikara wo: Kamaishi no Jirei ni Manabu Tsunami Bosai Kyoiku" (Empower children to survive: Tsunami disaster prevention education based on Kamaishi's case). He was born in Gifu Prefecture in 1960.

* * *

THE MIRACLE OF KAMAISHI

The killer tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake destroyed Kamaishi's seawall, which was said to be the sturdiest in the world. Immediately after the quake, schoolchildren in areas that were marked safe on the hazard map began to flee before the tsunami warning was issued. The youngsters led preschoolers and elderly citizens by hand as they fled, urging adults along the way to follow them. Almost all of the city's approximately 3,000 elementary and junior high school pupils survived the tsunami.

This episode came to be known as the "Miracle of Kamaishi."

It was the result of Katada's disaster prevention education that taught youngsters not to believe blindly in damage predictions, to do their best in any given situation, and to urge everyone else to flee with them.

Rice planting allowed in 20-km zone

March 20, 2013

Nuclear disaster headquarters to lift rice planting restriction in 20km area

<http://fukushima-diary.com/2013/03/nuclear-disaster-headquarters-to-lift-rice-planting-restriction-in-20km-area/>

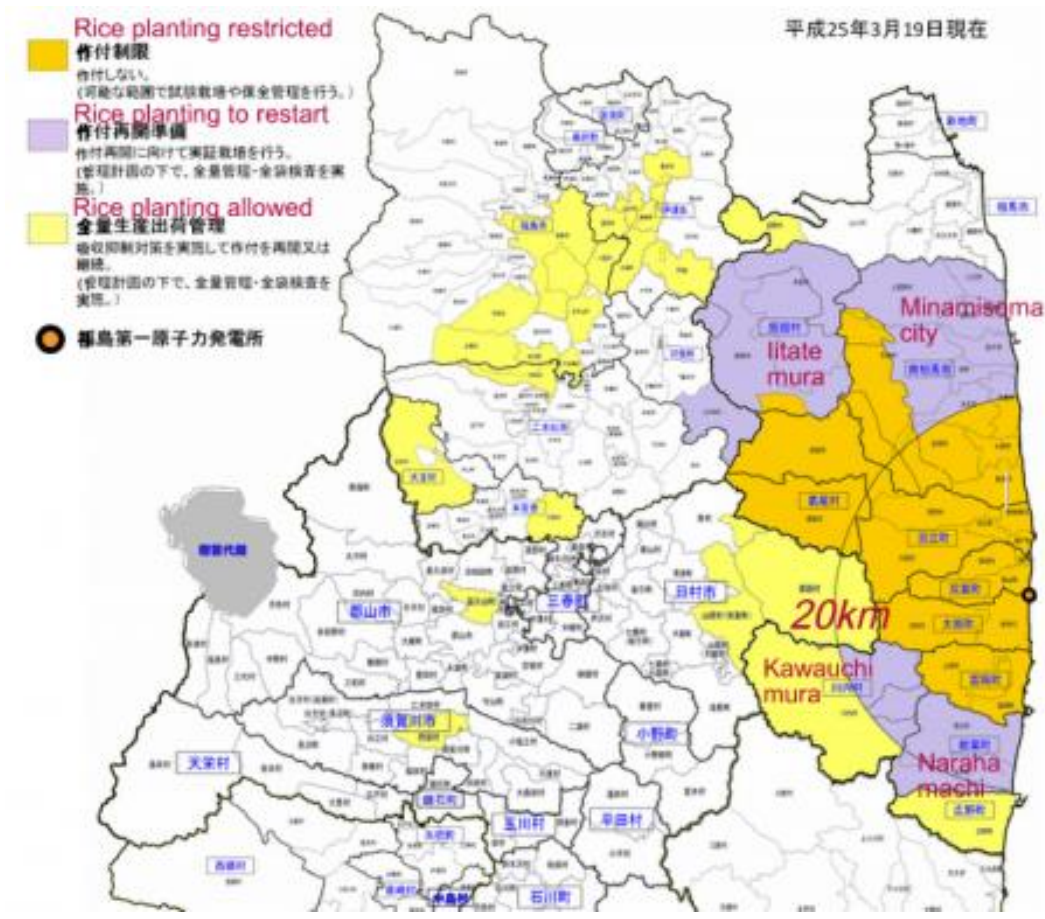
Posted by **Mochizuki** on March 20th, 2013 ·

On 3/19/2013, Nuclear disaster headquarters of Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet announced to lift the rice planting restriction from Naraha machi, Kawauchi mura, Kawamata machi, Iitate mura, and Minamisoma city of Fukushima.

In these areas, they are going to start the experimental planting to restart the ordinary rice planting in 2013.

In Narahamachi, the restriction of rice planting will be lifted in all the areas including the former evacuation zone of 20km area.

Kawauchi mura has almost 40% of the area in 20km zone, but it's also lifted including the evacuation zone.



<http://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/seisan/kokumotu/pdf/130319-07.pdf>

<http://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/seisan/kokumotu/pdf/130319-08.pdf>

<http://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/seisan/kokumotu/130319.html>

Not brilliant

March 21, 2013

Only one-third of nuclear damage cases settled

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130321_12.html

About two-thirds of people who filed compensation claims relating to the Fukushima nuclear disaster are still waiting for a government body to settle their cases.

The Japanese government set up an arbitration body to mediate settlements between the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company, and the victims of the accident.

Arbitrators have received about 5,800 claims from September 2011, six months after the nuclear disaster, through Monday.

But only about 1,900 have been settled.

The number of settlements topped new claims for the first time in January this year.

Helping evacuees find jobs

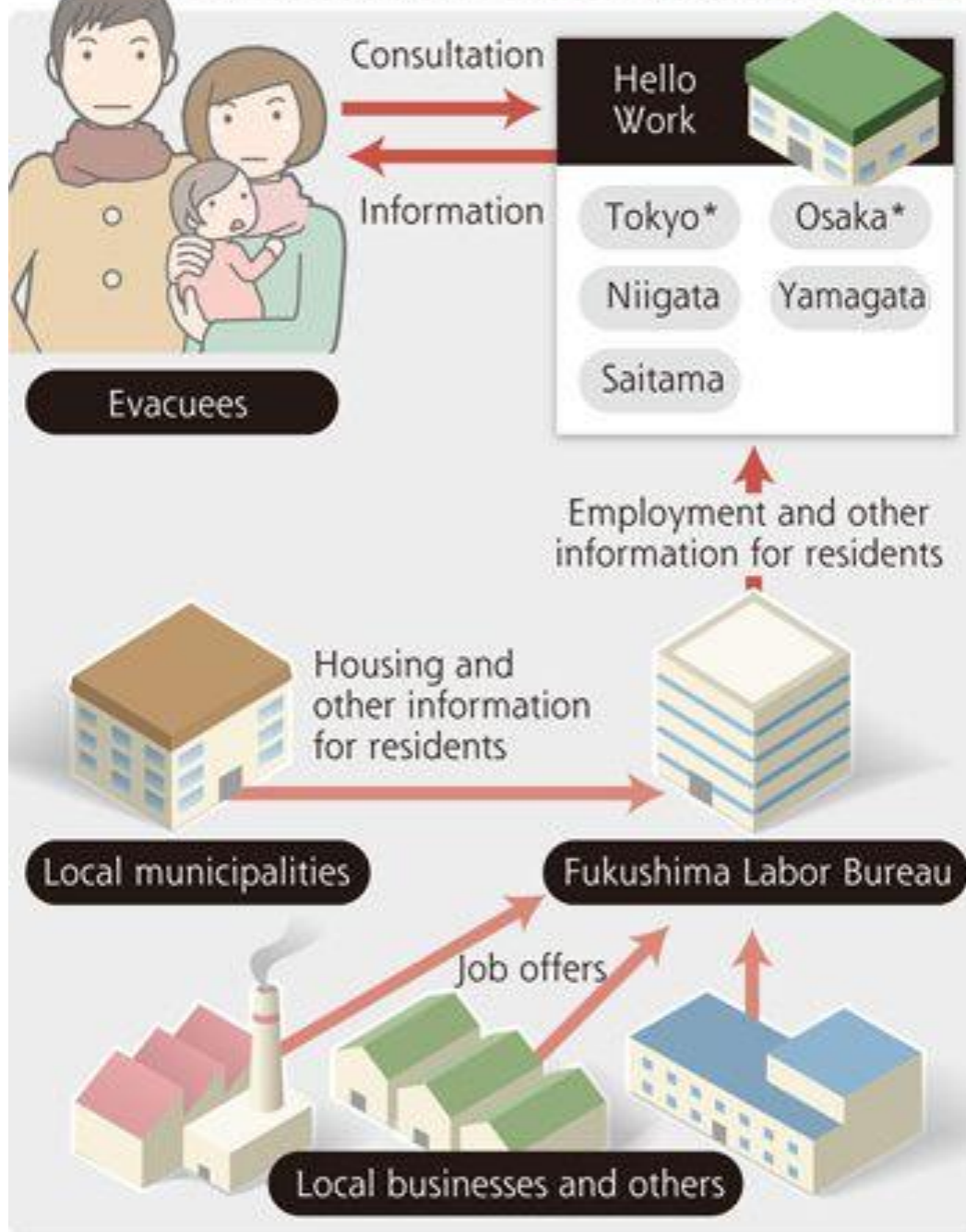
March 18, 2013

N-evacuees to get job assistance / Labor ministry to also help people forced to flee find rental housing

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130318003683.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Process for helping evacuees return to Fukushima Prefecture and find jobs



**Job fairs to be held in Tokyo and Osaka*

The labor ministry will launch a project in fiscal 2013 to help people who were forced to evacuate from Fukushima Prefecture after the March 2011 disaster find jobs so they can return home.

The ministry will also help people who fled after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the outbreak of the nuclear crisis to find rented accommodation. The envisioned project was prompted by the fact that many

evacuees are reluctant to return due to job shortages, even in areas where the effects of radiation have decreased.

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry will open a support desk for evacuees in Tokyo and the prefectures of Yamagata, Niigata, Saitama and Osaka, where many disaster victims now live. Similar support for evacuees living in Fukushima Prefecture will also be expanded.

According to the Fukushima prefectural government, about 57,000 residents had evacuated outside the prefecture as of February.

Some local municipalities have begun to urge such people to return home, as two years have passed since the disaster, but the results have been disappointing.

An intermittent survey of evacuees conducted jointly from August through January by the Reconstruction Agency, eight municipalities near Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant and Fukushima Prefecture found that most respondents had not returned to their hometowns because of high radiation.

However, 20 percent to nearly 50 percent of evacuees in seven of the eight municipalities said they had not returned because they would have no job even if they did go back.

Similar tendencies are said to have been seen among evacuees from areas with lower radiation worries, comparatively far from the plant.

Multiple answers were allowed, and the surveyed people differed by municipality, ranging from heads of households to those aged 18 or over. The eight municipalities are Katsurao, Okuma, Futaba, Iitate, Tamura, Tomioka, Naraha and Namie.

In the envisioned project, special counselors will be stationed at Hello Work public job placement centers in Tokyo and Yamagata, Niigata, Saitama and Osaka prefectures to provide evacuees with comprehensive support.

The counselors will help evacuees find jobs that meet their needs and provide them with such information as vacancies in rental accommodations, which will be collected by the ministry's Fukushima labor bureau through local municipalities.

According to the labor bureau, the ratio of job offers to applicants in Fukushima Prefecture rose to 1.23-to-1 in January from 0.49-to-1 immediately after the disaster, reflecting a labor shortage mainly in the construction industry on the back of reconstruction demand.

There is, however, a gap between the nature of the jobs available and the wishes of job seekers, who want stable labor conditions such as work as a regular employee.

Only about 40 percent of job offers were for regular employment. Clerical jobs are particularly sought after, but the ratio of such job offers to applicants was 0.38-to-1.

The ratio has also been pushed up as the number of job seekers dwindled with the decrease in residents. The key question is how many jobs the new support desks can introduce that will satisfy the needs of job seekers.

The ministry will organize job fairs in Tokyo and Osaka, inviting companies that have offices in Fukushima Prefecture, to help evacuees living in the Kinki region and surrounding areas, as well as in the Tokyo metropolitan area, find jobs so they can return to their hometowns.

Increasing land prices hamper rebuilding

March 22, 2013

Land price increases in disaster-hit prefectures cause concern

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130322p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Average land prices rose in some parts of Iwate and Miyagi prefectures hard hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami due to growing demand from disaster victims who are trying to relocate or permanently settle in some areas, including formerly submerged districts.

But they did not bring optimism to local residents who are worried that such land price increases may hamper their efforts to rebuild their houses.

In Fukushima Prefecture, average land prices jumped only in Iwaki, which has been accommodating large numbers of evacuees from areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

These trends were reflected in an annual survey released March 21 by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism on average land prices in Japan.

"I thought reconstruction would progress once areas around here became lively," said Wakako Izumisawa, 57, who works at a barber shop in Yamada's Nagasaki district in Iwate Prefecture. She simply cannot understand why the district ranked top among the prefecture's commercial districts in terms of the rate of land price increases

The district was submerged due to the huge tsunami and some businesses shut down after the natural disasters. "There were no visible signs of development," she added.

In Iwate Prefecture, the prices of upland locations along the coast and land lots that suffered limited damage jumped. The prices of upland residential locations in the Otsuchi district in the town of Otsuchi soared 15 percent from a year ago, the second highest rate in Japan. All told, the top 10 locations in terms of the rate of land price gains are all located along the coast.

But for residents who plan to rebuild their houses, surging prices of upland locations can be an obstacle. A 66-year-old builder in Otsuchi says, "If land prices rise further, more and more residents will leave here to settle elsewhere."

Miyagi Prefecture is experiencing a similar phenomenon. The rate of appreciation for residential areas stood at 1.4 percent, the highest in the nation, and the number of locations with higher land prices jumped to 256 from 64 last year.

A residential area near Ishinomaki's Okaido-nishi 1 district which was inundated 1 meter or more above floor level with water from the tsunami posted a gain of 3.6 percent this year after a drop of 5.2 percent last year. The prices of upland locations are continuing to increase and there are growing needs of houses in lightly submerged districts.

According to the Miyagi Association of Real Estate Appraisers, there have been growing instances of residents who are trying to build their houses on their former premises due to a lack of locations and rising prices of land along the coast. Kazutoshi Chiba, head of the association's disaster-hit real estate appraiser team, predicts the tendency of land prices to rise will continue this year.

Fukushima Prefecture experienced a drop of 1.9 percent in land prices on average. The prices of residential locations dropped an average of 1.6 percent, although 39 locations out of the prefecture's 314

areas in the survey posted gains for the first time in 14 years. Of the 39 locations, 37 are in Iwaki which posted a 0.7 percent gain, becoming the prefecture's sole municipality to register a rise.

The number of evacuees in Iwaki totaled 23,901 as of March 1. According to the city's house-building guidance section, applications to build new houses by evacuees from the nuclear disaster totaled two in fiscal 2010, 52 in fiscal 2011 and 119 in fiscal 2012 (as of January 2013). Sadao Suzuki, a real estate appraiser who checked the applications, says evacuees are trying to purchase houses in Iwaki, leading to increases in land prices.

Lack of outdoor exercise and obesity in Fukushima

March 24, 2013

Ibaraki students ace fitness test / Bumps Fukui in rankings; Fukushima drops significantly on list

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130323003359.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Ibaraki Prefecture has surpassed Fukui Prefecture in the rankings of middle school students' physical fitness, while Fukushima Prefecture dropped significantly on the list, possibly due to a lack of exercise caused by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

On Friday, the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry announced the results of its fiscal 2012 physical fitness survey of students, which targeted fifth-graders at primary schools and second-year students at middle schools.

The test assesses physical strength, athletic ability and fitness routines, and was conducted for the first time in two years, as the fiscal 2011 test was not carried out due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. This year was the fourth national test overall.

[...]

In contrast, Fukushima Prefecture dropped sharply in the rankings--from 32nd to 45th for fifth-grade boys and from 19th to 30th for fifth-grade girls.

Fukushima Prefecture also ranked the worst for childhood obesity. Its obesity rate was the highest in the nation--17.2 percent for fifth-grade boys and 12.6 percent for fifth-grade girls, an increase of 1.7 and 2.1 percentage points, respectively, from the previous test.

The prefecture's obesity rate for second-year middle school students also edged up and was ranked the second worst for both girls and boys.

An official at the Fukushima prefectural board of education said the poor results were likely linked to the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. "The continued restriction of outdoor activities due to the crisis deprived children of time and opportunities for doing exercise," the official said.

The educational board has promoted the introduction of exercise programs for children codeveloped with Fukushima University. The official said: "We'd like to improve children's physical strength by making them move their bodies on a daily basis at places that are familiar to them."

[...]

Preserve or not preserve? Wounds still fresh

3/11 still too raw to make hard and fast decisions about preservation issues

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201303240042>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The scars of the earthquake and tsunami disaster that devastated coastlines of northeastern Japan two years ago are still visible, prompting calls in affected local communities to preserve oral and written memories, as well as records, of the event that claimed nearly 20,000 lives.

Yet, there is disagreement about the propriety of preserving "earthquake relics" while the wounds of March 11, 2011, are still so raw.

"When the water of the Pacific Ocean rose up, I thought it was the end. I began to chant, 'Namu Amida Butsu,'" said a man in his 70s whose wife perished in the towering waves.

More than 1,000 residents of the city of Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, were killed.

On March 10, the day before second anniversary observances of the disaster, video testimony by surviving residents was being edited at the municipal library for a documentary to be released in April.

Library workers began visiting survivors last spring. Other research institutions are making similar efforts, but Yoshitaka Kato, the library's 42-year-old assistant director, said, "As survivors ourselves, there are certain things only we can ask."

A limited budget meant only 88 people were interviewed on film. "We want to preserve the intangible (aspects of the disaster) and help educate people about disaster preparedness," said Kato.

Fukushima Prefecture is also collecting video testimony of 200 or so people, but it has no plans to release the footage in documentary format.

In the rush to preserve a coherent record of 3/11, officials acknowledge that they are locked in a race against time as memories fade and documents become scattered and lost.

Further north, the Iwate Prefectural Library is working to preserve records such as event information distributed by volunteer organizations at evacuee shelters and newspapers made by residents and delivered to temporary housing.

It has already collected more than 5,000 items and is asking the public to provide more, saying that it "cannot find materials from immediately after the earthquake."

The library has begun partnering with the Miyagi and Fukushima prefectural libraries, Tohoku University and other institutions to amass more documents.

On March 8, a library employee visited the Kobe University Library. Yoko Inaba, an adjunct instructor at Tezukayama University, once worked there. She put together the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Disaster Materials Collection, and is now calling for "partnerships with volunteers and others from the private sector."

"Interest faded two years after the Great Hanshin Earthquake (which devastated Kobe and neighboring vicinities in 1995)," Inaba said. "I want the library to release all its materials about the Great East Japan Earthquake."

The National Diet Library launched the Great East Japan Earthquake Archive (<http://kn.ndl.go.jp/>), a searchable online system, on March 7. Users can search the 2.3 million items, which include video and photos owned or released by the news media and others, by keyword and geographical area.

PROS AND CONS OF PRESERVATION

Arguments have raged back and forth over whether to keep or destroy "earthquake relics" such as town halls and other structures that were damaged.

One such building is the disaster prevention office in the town of Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, where 42 workers and visitors died or were never heard of again.

On March 11, local residents and outsiders came to pray and lay flowers at an altar erected outside the building, where steel beams stand exposed.

A 60-year-old man from Chiba commented on the demolition debate: "I know there are circumstances like how the bereaved feel and expenses for maintenance and management, but if the building weren't here then I might not have come to this town."

The town originally planned to preserve the building, but reversed course in September 2011 and decided to demolish it at the insistence of bereaved relatives.

Miyoko Chiba, 66, lost her son-in-law, who worked for the town. She said, "It pains me to look at the building and recall the earthquake."

The situation changed again last August, when the town government and assembly received three different petitions from bereaved family members and residents: "demolish immediately," "temporarily postpone demolition" and "preserve."

The town assembly seized on the "demolish immediately" petition, but Mayor Jin Sato veered toward caution in addressing the diverse opinions of residents and outsiders.

"We are not changing the demolition plan, but we'd like a little more time," he said.

Last October, the city of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, announced that it will demolish the Kadonowaki Elementary School building, which was gutted by fire. However, the city was forced to reconsider the plan due to an outcry from those wanting to preserve it.

As for the town hall of Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, where more than 30 employees lost their lives, an outside review committee is examining the arguments on both sides, including the feelings of victims' relatives and maintenance costs. The town will release its findings by the end of the fiscal year on March 31.

The 3/11 earthquake memory preservation study group, created by experts, is pushing for the preservation of 46 sites in Miyagi Prefecture. The chairman, Takuro Kimura, said: "Municipalities struck by the disaster do not have the budgets or the manpower now to preserve (these sites). We also understand the feelings of grieving family members. Rather than rushing to a conclusion, we need a moratorium to delay the demolition."

(This story was compiled from reports by Hideshi Nishimoto and Yoshiyuki Ito.)

Namie teacher back in classroom

March 24, 2013

Teachers return to clean classrooms 2 years after Fukushima disaster

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201303240057

By SHINICHI FUJIWRA/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Children's satchels scattered on the floor on March 11, 2011, were just as Shoko Tsushima remembered.

She gently wiped the dust of each satchel and placed them on the desks of her former pupils.

For Tsushima, her March 23 visit back to Namie Elementary School was her way of reconnecting to the evacuated town of Namie after it was designated a no-entry zone following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Tsushima and 20 other teachers returned to the school to clean up, just days before a ban on entry to the neighborhood is eased on April 1.

"My students have been scattered, but I want to see them someday," said Tsushima, 52, who was in charge of fourth-graders.

Her former pupils graduated this spring, mostly from elementary schools in municipalities to which they were evacuated.

Tsushima, who now teaches in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, wrote a message on the blackboard, addressed to "all of you I like so much at Namie Elementary School."

"Hang in there, with hopes and dreams," the message went on. "I am looking forward to seeing you, all grown up. I will hang in there, too."

The school is scheduled to be opened, mainly to parents, in May.

"When my students visit here someday, I want them to relive their happy days at the school before the disaster," Tsushima said.

Takakatsu Watanabe, 40, who was in charge of second-graders, also put satchels and other belongings in order, voicing the names of his former pupils as he went.

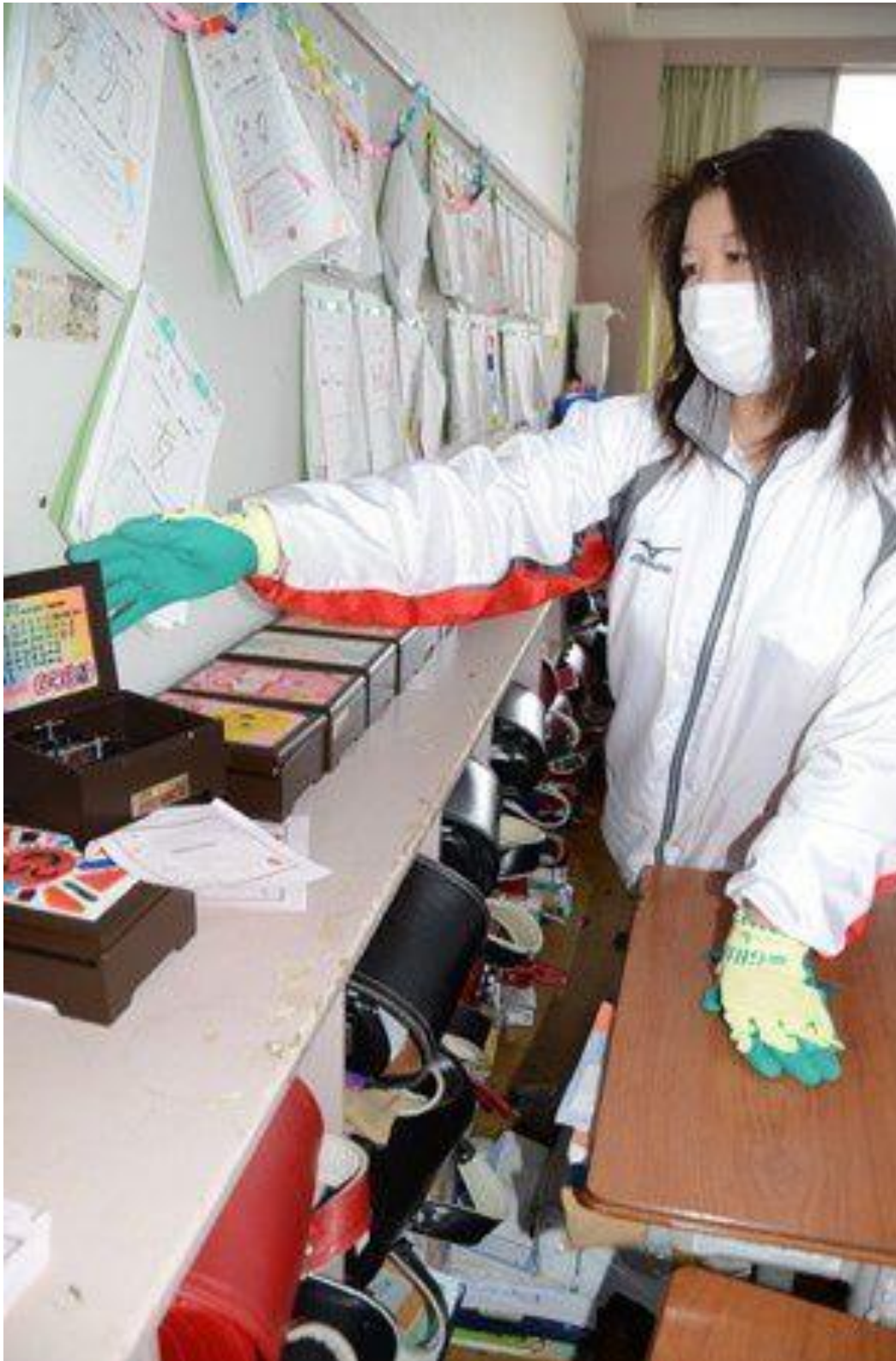
"I am cleaning the classroom, hoping that one or more students will want to keep their satchel with them one day," he said.

Tsushima, Watanabe and other teachers who visited Namie Elementary School were working at the school two years ago when disaster struck.

They were joined by teachers from an elementary school in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, for students who were formerly at elementary schools in Namie.

March 23, 2013

Teachers collect students' memories at radiation tainted Fukushima school



Teacher Keiko Watanabe looks at music boxes that her former sixth-grade students had made as she goes through an abandoned school in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 23. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130323p2a00m0na014000c.html>

NAMIE, Fukushima -- When 20 teachers entered their former school here, it was as if time had stopped after the triple disasters of March 2011.

On a temporary visit on March 23, Keiko Watanabe and her colleagues combed through the abandoned building of Namie Elementary School -- still designated an off-limits area due to the ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant

Books, bags and shoes that had fallen from classroom shelves littered the floor. Students' essays and pictures still hung on the wall. Music boxes that Watanabe's graduating sixth-graders had made to commemorate their last days in elementary school sat side by side on a shelf.

"Everything is the way it was that day," Watanabe said. "I wonder if my students are all doing well."

The teachers were beginning the process of returning former students' belongings to their owners -- on condition that the items pass radiation checks.

After Namie Elementary School resumed classes in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu in August 2011, some of the school's teachers returned to Namie to collect books and other materials they needed for classes. But the children's personal belongings had remained untouched.

The town of Namie will undergo rezoning on April 1, but even if residents are allowed to enter parts of town, they will still be prohibited from staying overnight, and Namie Elementary is not expected to reopen within the town's borders for at least another four years. This situation prompted teachers to try, at least, to return their former students' belongings to their rightful owners, along with the memories accompanying them.

When the massive quake struck, Watanabe was teaching class. Screaming gave way to crying from the majority of her students. Empty-handed and wearing only their indoor shoes, the students were taken out to the school field. From the east -- the direction of the ocean -- they could hear the rumbling of a tsunami swallowing the town. Joyful memories of school were instantly painted over with terror. By the following morning, residents had been ordered to evacuate, with students and teachers scattering around the country.

Watanabe says it pains her to receive letters and calls from her former students saddened by their separation from family members and friends, but hopes that returning the children's belongings to them will help ease the pain.

"When everything's steeped in horrific memories, you can't take a step forward," she said. "I want them to have happy memories in the back of their mind, too."

Abe visits Fukushima

March 25, 2013

Abe visits Fukushima towns, vows to speed up rebuilding

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130324002479.htm>

Jiji-Daily Yomiuri

FUKUSHIMA--Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday inspected areas in Fukushima Prefecture hit hard by the nuclear crisis, and vowed the government would accelerate efforts to help the areas get back on their feet.

It was Abe's second visit to the prefecture since assuming the post in December.

Abe first visited Namie and Tomioka, the towns in the vicinity of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The towns have been designated as no-entry zones or expanded evacuation zones due to the nuclear crisis triggered by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami. However, Tomioka will be redesignated Monday and Namie on April 1, making it easier for residents to visit their hometowns.

Abe inspected shops, town government offices and other buildings. "The government will take every possible step to accelerate reconstruction work," he told the towns' mayors and other officials.

In Namie, Abe saw piles of debris still sitting in a shopping district. "It looks as if time has stopped here," Abe said.

Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba asked for government support to quickly remove such debris, and Tomioka Mayor Katsuya Endo called for help in securing places to store it.

"We'll try to respond to as many requests as possible," Abe told them.

The prime minister went to Koriyama in the afternoon, where he listened to farmers whose business has been seriously affected by adverse comments about radiation, and visited an indoor play facility for children.

Abe visits Fukushima to check reconstruction

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130324p2g00m0dm006000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Fukushima Prefecture on Sunday to check the progress of reconstruction in areas damaged by the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis. Abe stopped by Namie, a small town which was evacuated following the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, and to which residents' access is still restricted.

The entire town is currently designated as a no-go zone, but the boundaries of the restricted area will be redrawn April 1, with residents to be allowed to temporarily visit some parts. The premier visited the town to check its current state before the narrowing of the zone.

Abe will visit the town of Tomioka, where a no-go zone will be narrowed from Monday, and also hear from farmers in a city suffering from fears about radioactive contamination of their products.

It is Abe's fourth such tour in the quake-hit Tohoku region and the latest since he visited Iwate and Miyagi prefectures in February. He last visited Fukushima in December, just after he took office.

See also:

Abe visits Fukushima to check reconstruction efforts

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/25/national/abe-visits-fukushima-to-check-reconstruction-efforts/#.UU9bgzf1tEs>

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. hopes for 10% rise

March 25, 2013

Hokkaido Electric eyes rate hike in September

Jiji Press

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130324002593.htm>

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. plans to raise its electricity rates for households by about 10 percent, **as the suspension of nuclear reactors has lowered its earnings**, it has been learned.

The company, which serves Hokkaido, hopes to implement the rate hike on Sept. 1 after gaining government permission, informed sources said Saturday. It is also planning a rate hike for business users, which does not require the government's approval.

This would be the utility's first full-fledged rate hike with government approval since 1981, shortly after the second oil crisis

Revision of zoning

March 25, 2013

Nuke disaster exclusion zone change has Fukushima town ready for cherry blossom season

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130325p2a00m0na004000c.html>

TOMIOKA, Fukushima -- The cherry blossoms in this town are on the edge of blooming, and as of March 25 local residents can see the buds in person for the first time since the Fukushima nuclear disaster began more than two years ago.

Tomioka had been locked inside the nuclear disaster exclusion zone since the town was evacuated in March 2011. However, the national government has determined that radiation doses in about 70 percent of the town have fallen to 50 millisieverts per year or less -- still high, but low enough to re-designate these areas as open to temporary visits.

The rezoning happens to cover a good portion of Yonomori Park, known for its some 1,500 cherry trees lining an L-shaped road and forming a pink tunnel when in full bloom.

"The buds look ready to pop open," said Kiyoshi Horikawa, the 72-year-old chairman of a local cherry blossom viewing group as he looked on the trees on March 25.

The day also marked the beginning of decontamination work on the trees. Unfortunately, the east-west part of the route generally remains in the exclusion zone and generally out-of-bounds even for quick visits. Many of the trees in that section are more than a century old.

Nevertheless, the town government is planning a cherry blossom-viewing bus trip for residents in late April, and includes the section still inside the exclusion zone.

Nuclear evacuation zone revised in Fukushima's Tomioka

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/25/national/nuclear-evacuation-zone-revised-in-fukushimas-tomioka/#.UVAPITf1tEs>

TOMIOKA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. -- The government exclusion-zone designation was lifted Monday for Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, and the town was realigned into three nuclear evacuation zones according to estimated annual radiation doses.

Even after the revision took effect at midnight Sunday, the municipal government will keep the whole-town evacuation in place for at least four years due to the need to rebuild infrastructure damaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, which set off the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant, located north of the town.

Tomioka was the last Fukushima municipality to the south of the Fukushima No. 1 plant's two host towns to come out of the no-go zone designation by the central government.

Of the 11 municipalities around the plant that have been designated for evacuation, Tomioka is the eighth to undergo rezoning.

The prefectural police no longer restrict entry into the town, but the central government will take over checkpoints on national roads.

For a newly set zone where residents will not be allowed to return home at least for five years due to estimated annual radiation doses exceeding 50 millisieverts, the town will in principle ban people other than registered residents from entry. It blocked access by barricades at 128 locations on roads near the town border.

In the zone, which covers the northeastern part of the town, about 4,500 people had lived before the nuclear crisis started.

The central part of the town that used to be home to some 10,000 residents was designated as a residence restriction zone, with annual radiation doses estimated to be between 20 millisieverts and 50 millisieverts.

The remaining zone with an estimated 20 millisieverts or less, where the evacuation advisory is expected to be lifted at an early time, mainly covers southern Tomioka. About 1,500 people once resided in the area.

The central government, which issued the rezoning guidelines in 2011 for application beginning last spring, expects to lift the evacuation advisory for the most heavily contaminated zone in Tomioka in 2017 and the other two zones in 2016. The municipal government believes the town will not be fully ready for living at least until 2017.

The future of fisheries

Prosperity for fisheries

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/03/25/editorials/prosperity-for-fisheries/#.UVAQLDf1tEs>

With two years having passed since the massive quake and tsunami hit the Pacific coastal areas of the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011, some local people are making efforts to revive devastated fisheries. Both the central and local governments should assist such efforts.

Some 80 percent of the fishing boats damaged by the disasters have been repaired in Iwate Prefecture and about 70 percent in Miyagi Prefecture. But in Fukushima Prefecture, the corresponding rate is only about 40 percent. The prefecture suffered not only from the quake and tsunami but also from the catastrophe at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. In this difficult situation, the Soma Futaba fishing cooperative in the northern part of the prefecture resumed fishing on a trial basis in June 2012. It is shipping North Pacific giant octopuses that have passed a strict radioactivity test to Tokyo and 12 prefectures. It is good news that the fishing cooperative has been able to overcome widespread rumors that fishery products from Fukushima Prefecture are contaminated with radioactive substances.

In the Momoura area of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, 15 fishermen, all more than 60 years old, have established a firm specializing in oyster farming. On March 4, they had their first harvest. A special fisheries reconstruction zone was established in the area at the initiative of the prefectural government to introduce capital and knowhow from the private sector. The fishermen's company is receiving full support

from a fisheries firm in Sendai. The local firm is selling its products directly to stores and consumers instead of utilizing the more costly services of the local fishing cooperative.

It is becoming more and more necessary for fishermen in the Tohoku region and fishermen in general, for that matter, to add value to their products by processing them and then marketing them directly to consumers without relying on wholesalers.

Compared with fishing activities, per se, the recovery of the fish products processing sector in the Tohoku region has been slow. The central and local governments need to continue to support it financially and otherwise.

Now that the Abe administration has decided to join the talks for the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade scheme, **Japan may be forced to lower or abolish tariffs on fishery imports, and cheap fish may find their way into Japanese markets in large quantities in the future.** It may be necessary for fishermen not only in the Tohoku region but also in other parts of Japan to change their strategies and consider exporting their products.

To attract overseas customers, it will be important to add high value to fishery products through proper processing. Both the government and private sectors should carry out careful marketing research to determine what kinds of products foreign consumers would welcome. They should also take advantage of a trend in many countries that emphasizes eating more fish and less meat for health benefits, and promote their fish products accordingly.

Children from Futaba made welcome in Saitama

March 26, 2013

Fukushima evacuee kids made welcome in Saitama school

by Yoshiki Seto

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/26/national/fukushima-evacuee-kids-made-welcome-in-saitama-school/#.UVGQzjf1tEs>

FUKUSHIMA – With little hope of returning home, children from the town of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, are making new friends at a school in Saitama Prefecture that took them in two years ago after the meltdowns of March 2011 ruined the area.

Shortly after the devastating earthquake and tsunami hit the Tohoku region and knocked the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant out of control, its cohost Futaba, only 7 km away from the plant, had to evacuate to escape the radiation.

The Futaba municipal office was soon transferred to an evacuation center built in what used to be Kisai High School in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, where about 133 evacuees were living as of March 1, the town said.

Out of Kazo's 333 children, 49 still go to nearby Kisai Elementary, although the number has dropped from the initially registered 100.

School officials said many of the children looked plagued by anxiety and confusion, with some unable to stop crying or part with their parents after arriving at school. Others have refused to open their minds to reality since being relocated.

To provide psychological support, the school has organized interviews with counselors and held a group workshop to help the children remember their lives in Futaba.

The school also tried not to build any walls between the children from the two towns.

"There are certain things we're taking into consideration (for children from Futaba), but we try not to label them 'kids from Futaba' or differentiate them (from those from Kazo)," said Masanobu Matsui, the 58-year-old principal of Kisai Elementary School.

To help unite the children, the school has suggested that its marching band play a medley of songs from Kisai and from two schools the Fukushima children used to attend — Futaba Minami Elementary School and Futaba Kita Elementary School.

Among the 18 members of the band, all fourth- and fifth-graders, is 11-year-old Aika Kobayashi from Futaba Kita.

"When I get into sixth grade, I want to lead the junior students," Aika said.

At Kisai Elementary, Aika has made friends who enjoy jumping rope or doing homework together at her home.

Last December, Aika's class took part in the Saitama prefectural jump rope tournament. "Although we weren't able to make any good records in the tournament, I enjoyed it very much that we all worked together," she said.

Her 37-year-old mother, Yuka, said she is thankful for the school. "Since the school treated her equally (with students in Kisai) from the beginning, my daughter was able to fit in smoothly," she said.

Hiroshi Sato, a 38-year-old teacher from Futaba Minami who is working at Kisai, said, "The children from Futaba have gotten accustomed to school life here and are becoming cheerful."

As for the kids who have already left Kisai, about 80 percent of them relocated to Fukushima Prefecture. Aika's mother said she thought of moving her family back to Fukushima too in the first year but decided to stay in Kazo until Aika graduates from high school.

"I'd feel sorry if she had to start again from scratch," she said.

Sato, the teacher, said, "I hope kids will hold their own goals or dreams for the future and stay positive. I'd like to continue offering them moral support."

Mortality rate in Minamisoma nursing homes up

March 27, 2013

Nursing home ranks' mortality rate up 2.7 times; report cites cold

Elderly 3/11 nuke evacuee deaths spiked

Nursing home ranks' mortality rate up 2.7 times; report cites cold

by Mizuho Aoki

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/27/national/elderly-311-nuke-evacuee-deaths-spiked/#.UVMZaTf1tEs>

The mortality rate of elderly residents of nursing-care facilities in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, jumped nearly 2.7 times after they evacuated the city in the days following the March 11, 2011, start of the nuclear disaster, due to poor living conditions, a study found.

The study, conducted by University of Tokyo researchers and released Wednesday, found some nursing home residents had to travel more than 300 km after enduring the Tohoku region's biting cold without heat or lunches for about a week. Researchers believe this may have contributed to the rise in the mortality rate.

"Many people who needed distinct and difficult assistance died at evacuation sites," a staff member at a nursing-care facility in Minamisoma said.

The study tracked evacuation records of 328 residents at five elderly nursing homes for about a year after 3/11. The research was led by Shuhei Nomura, a graduate student in global health policy at the university, with support from Kenji Shibuya, professor of health policy, among others.

All 328 residents were evacuated from the city with support from facilities' staff about a week after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, some traveling distances of between 200 km and 300 km in buses, the report said.

Among the 328 elderly residents, 75 had died within about a year of 3/11. **When compared with the average mortality rate of the five preceding years, the rate was roughly 2.7 times higher.**

At facilities where residents were not provided with lunches for nearly a week because a lunch distributing firm had already halted operations due to the nuclear disaster, the mortality rate soared about three to four times higher than average, Nomura said, adding the elderly couldn't use heaters on air-conditioning units for fear of letting radioactive materials inside and some had to sleep on the floor at evacuation centers.

"It's Tohoku, so it must have been really freezing," Nomura told The Japan Times. "I believe they lost their physical strength during that time."

Meanwhile, no statistically significant increase in the mortality rate was found at a facility where residents were able to use heaters and were given three meals a day, the report said. That facility was able to provide a more comfortable environment for its residents because it was preparing its own meals and its heaters were a type that did not take in outside air, Nomura said.

The study was published Wednesday in the U.S. based online science journal PLOS ONE.

Compensation for agricultural losses

March 27, 2013

TEPCO expands agricultural fund area

Jiji Press

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130326004073.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has announced it will expand the geographical area in which it will compensate for losses stemming from radiation fears related to agricultural, marine and forestry products following the March 2011 crisis at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

TEPCO announced Monday that Iwate and Miyagi prefectures will be added to the six prefectures, including Fukushima, where losses are currently compensated.

The company will begin sending and accepting claims documents on Wednesday.

TEPCO will compensate for estimated lost earnings caused by consumers avoiding products, costs for radiation tests and the disposal of returned products. Compensation will be paid to producers, processors and distributors.

No need to save power next summer?

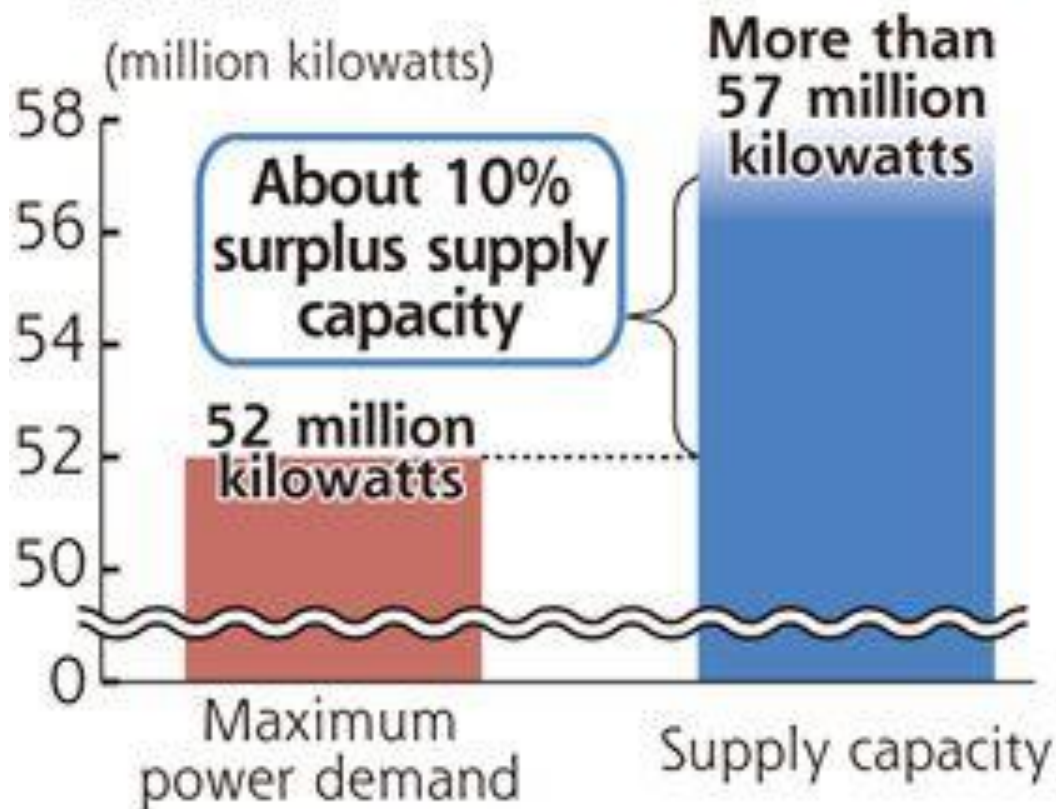
March 27, 2013

TEPCO may skip summer power targets

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/20130326dy01.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s projection for supply and demand of electricity this summer



Tokyo Electric Power Co. expects to be able to comfortably meet electricity demand this summer due to the restart of a key thermal power plant and the activation of two new generators, it has been learned.

A power saving campaign with a numerical target will likely be unnecessary this summer in TEPCO's service area because the firm's expected power supply capacity of more than 57 million kilowatts will exceed last summer's maximum demand of 50.8 million kilowatts by about 10 percent, sources said.

TEPCO will be able to stably supply electricity to Tokyo and its surrounding areas due to the restart of a thermal power plant, which suspended operations in the wake of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and other newly constructed thermal power plants.

Construction of two coal-power thermal power generators--Hirono No. 6 generator in Fukushima Prefecture and Hitachinaka No. 2 in Ibaraki Prefecture with a total output of 1.6 million kilowatts--had begun before the disaster, and both are set to start operating next month.

Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Haramachi Nos. 1 and 2 generators in Fukushima Prefecture, with a total output of 2 million kilowatts, were damaged by the disaster but are expected to begin full operations this summer. Half of their power generation is to be supplied to TEPCO's service area.

Supply capacity last summer reached 57 million kilowatts at a time when some emergency thermal generators in vacant plots of land were in use at some thermal plants. As newly constructed plants are to begin operations, power generation should be more stable than it was last year.

Maximum power demand could possibly rise due to a recovery in production levels at some companies, but power saving awareness among them has increased. "Maximum power demand will be 52 million kilowatts this summer and won't largely exceed that of last summer," a TEPCO official said. Maximum power demand in 2010, the year before the disaster, was about 60 million kilowatts.

The government is studying the projection for the supply and demand of electricity to devise measures for saving power this summer, and plans to set a power saving goal at the end of next month.

(Mar. 27, 2013)

Google street views of no-go zone

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xyj3ys_visite-virtuelle-dans-la-zone-interdite-de-fukushima_news
virtual visit of ghost-town Namie

Google adds street views inside Japan nuclear zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130328p2g00m0dm036000c.html>



This screenshot made from the Google Maps website provided on March 27, 2013, by Google, shows stranded ships left as a testament to the power of the tsunami which hit the area, near a road in March, 2013, in Namie, Japan, a nuclear no-go zone where former residents have been unable to live since they fled from radioactive contamination from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant two years ago. (AP Photo/Google)

TOKYO (AP) -- Concrete rubble litters streets lined with shuttered shops and dark windows. A collapsed roof juts from the ground. A ship sits stranded on a stretch of dirt flattened when the tsunami roared across the coastline. There isn't a person in sight.

Google Street View is giving the world a rare glimpse into one of Japan's eerie ghost towns, created when the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami sparked a nuclear disaster that has left the area uninhabitable. The technology pieces together digital images captured by Google's fleet of camera-equipped vehicles and allows viewers to take virtual tours of locations around the world, including faraway spots like the South Pole and fantastic landscapes like the Grand Canyon.

Now it is taking people inside Japan's nuclear no-go zone, to the city of Namie, whose 21,000 residents have been unable to return to live since they fled the radiation spewing from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant two years ago.

Koto Naganuma, 32, who lost her home in the tsunami, said some people find it too painful to see the places that were so familiar yet are now so out of reach.

She has only gone back once, a year ago, and for a few minutes.

"I'm looking forward to it. I'm excited I can take a look at those places that are so dear to me," said Naganuma. "It would be hard, too. No one is going to be there."

Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba said memories came flooding back as he looked at the images shot by Google earlier this month.

He spotted an area where an autumn festival used to be held and another of an elementary school that was once packed with schoolchildren.

"Those of us in the older generation feel that we received this town from our forbearers, and we feel great pain that we cannot pass it down to our children," he said in a post on his blog.

"We want this Street View imagery to become a permanent record of what happened to Namie-machi in the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster."

Street View was started in 2007, and now provides images from more than 3,000 cities across 48 countries, as well as parts of the Arctic and Antarctica.

Google Street View provides glimpse inside Japan's nuclear no-go zone



AP, Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/28/national/google-street-view-provides-glimpse-inside-japans-nuclear-no-go-zone/#.UVPs_Df1tEs

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The municipal government of Namie asked Google to take the pictures to help prevent the memory of the natural and nuclear disasters from fading away. Google took pictures of collapsed houses and scattered debris in residential areas by using its camera-equipped Street View cars for two weeks from March 4.

Koto Naganuma, 32, who lost her home in the tsunami, said some people find it too painful to see the places that were so familiar yet are now so out of reach. She has only gone back once, a year ago, and then for a few minutes.

"I'm looking forward to it. I'm excited I can take a look at those places that are so dear to me," said Naganuma. "It would be hard, too. No one is going to be there."

Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba said memories came flooding back as he looked at the images shot by Google earlier this month. He spotted an area where an autumn festival used to be held and another of an elementary school that was once packed with schoolchildren.

"Those of us in the older generation feel that we received this town from our forbearers, and we feel great pain that we cannot pass it down to our children," he said in a post on his blog. "We want this Street View imagery to become a permanent record of what happened to Namie in the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster."

Street View was launched in 2007, and now provides images from more than 3,000 cities across 48 countries, as well as parts of the Arctic and Antarctica.

Compensation will include losses of real estate and household articles

TEPCO set to pay compensation for assets in nuclear crisis evacuation zones

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130329p2a00m0na008000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is set to begin paying compensation to residents of evacuation zones in 11 municipalities near the utility's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant for the loss of real estate and household articles.

TEPCO made the announcement here on March 29, stating that it will soon begin accepting requests for the compensation. It will begin payments in late April at the earliest, company officials said.

The decision opens the way for nuclear crisis evacuees to begin full-scale efforts to get their lives back to normal, such as buying new houses in the areas they're now living. The utility has already been paying damages for emotional distress and business losses resulting from the nuclear crisis triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO will calculate compensation amounts for buildings based on their appraised value for fixed property taxes, or the average prices of new houses in their respective areas.

The power company will pay compensation for household articles such as furniture based on the number of members of each household and family composition.

TEPCO announced the criteria for paying compensation for real estates and household articles in July last year, eight months before it announced that it will shortly begin paying compensation.

As to the reason for the delay in starting the payment program, TEPCO Vice President and head of the utility's Fukushima disaster recovery headquarters Yoshiyuki Ishizaki explained that it took the firm a long time to examine unregistered real estate. Specifically, he pointed out that the names of owners of numerous properties in affected areas had not been renewed even though they were registered several decades ago.

"We apologize for the delay in the procedures for paying compensation that will be crucial for evacuees' efforts to put their lives back in order," Ishizaki told a news conference in Fukushima on March 29.

Structures that were damaged directly by earthquakes and tsunami are not covered by the compensation program, while standards for compensation for forests and farmland have not yet been determined.

The new ambassadors

March 28, 2013

Tohoku high schoolers serve as ambassadors at foreign schools

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201303280009>

By MARIKO SUGIYAMA/ Staff Writer

High schoolers from Japan's disaster-hit prefectures are going abroad not only as students but also as "diplomats," sharing their experiences and thoughts with others of their generation.

Seventeen-year-old Atsuko Arimoto, who is currently studying at a boarding school in Maryland, took time during a brief trip home to talk to other students from Japan's disaster-stricken areas.

"True, I face difficulties in studying in an unfamiliar environment. But (in the United States) I am being supported by friends who come from different countries," Arimoto told a group of some 50 students in Tokyo on March 9. "I believe this experience will be a great asset in my life."

Arimoto's home in the town of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, was only 3 kilometers away from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and was part of the designated no-entry zone.

Her family was forced to move from one evacuation center to the next four times before moving into a provisional housing unit in Iwaki, located about 40 kilometers away from the Fukushima plant in the same prefecture.

In 2012, she won a scholarship for the Beyond Tomorrow High School Study Abroad Program, sponsored by the Global Fund for Education Assistance.

Before her departure last summer, Arimoto gave a speech in front of then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was visiting Japan for a conference.

In her speech, Arimoto thanked the U.S. military for its support in relief efforts for the Tohoku region, which was devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

She also said, "My dream is to become a diplomat and return some of what I have received."

When she talked about her experience of the earthquake and tsunami to her classmates in the United States, she said she was bombarded with questions such as "Are people still evacuating?" and "Will you never be able to return home?"

She answered each question thoroughly, which made her feel it was worth going abroad.

But there is one thing she said she wants to convey more than anything.

"Even though my life has changed dramatically due to the disaster, I do not feel I am unhappy."

Having received help and support, she now wants to act for others, she said.

She took her first step toward that dream on March 16, from when she spent about a week in the Dominican Republic as part of a volunteer team to build a house for homeless children.

AFS Intercultural Programs also provides full scholarships for high school students studying abroad at least a year. Together, these two organizations have sent 17 students from the disaster areas to 10 countries. Eleven more students are expected to leave Japan for foreign high schools this summer.

Riko Fujii, a second-year student at Iwate prefectural Morioka Daiichi Senior High School studied for one year beginning January 2012 at a Malaysian high school.

A native of Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, she lost her grandfather, who was in the hospital at the time, in the tsunami.

She told her Malaysian classmates of her experience of the disaster and showed them photos. One of them asked how to protect oneself from an earthquake, and Fujii answered, "Turn off the heat and take cover under a desk."

Everyone looked as if they were hearing that lesson for the first time, Fujii said, adding that there seemed to be no disaster prevention education in the country.

Some students mistakenly thought that due to high levels of radiation, people were unable to enter eastern Japan, she said.

"A lack of information on post-disaster situations causes people to speculate," said Fujii, 18, in a telephone interview. "I felt the need of passing on information directly."

Nanami Takahashi, 17, is studying at a high school in northern France.

She organized a gathering of foreign students to exchange views on the earthquake that hit Japan in 2011, and said she was moved by what a Norwegian student had to say.

"The student hoped that Norway would further put a lot of effort into wind power generation so it could provide electricity to other countries that have been relying on nuclear energy," she said in a telephone interview.

Takahashi said she wants to take that student's message home with her.

She was in Sendai when the earthquake struck.

Takahashi's mother cried every night because she had been unable to reach her parents (Takahashi's grandparents) who lived near the coast, Takahashi recalled.

Her father, who saw people washed away by the tsunami from the window at his workplace, was troubled by nightmares.

Takahashi said she was able to overcome her own anxieties thanks to encouraging messages coming from around the world.

She says she wants to create a place where the young people of the world can discuss lessons from the disaster and apply them into the future.

Participating in the Beyond Tomorrow High School Study Abroad Program are five boarding schools in the United States and Europe, which waive tuition and board for students from disaster-stricken areas until their graduation.

In addition, the fund uses contributions from companies to provide each student with 20,000 yen (\$212.20) a month for living expenses.

A Swiss high school hosts a student from Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, who lost her mother in the tsunami.

"We would consider providing support for other students if we receive recommendations for such action," said an official in charge of foreign students.

However, it is up to the schools whether students are allowed to study for a prolonged period at the same school.

"We want to see an increase in host schools, but two years after the disaster it is very difficult. (Many schools are reluctant) even after we give detailed explanations," said an official at the Beyond Tomorrow program.

At AFS, the situation is even more strained.

The organization relies on private donations for each student's study expenses of 1.5 million yen. AFS sent more than 10 students abroad in 2012 and this year, but only seven students will be sent in 2014, mostly to the United States.

Private companies donated large amounts immediately after the earthquake, but such donations are declining.

AFS Japan fears it may not be able to afford to seek applicants for studying abroad in 2015 and after. "I want many people to see students who have studied overseas and realize that ours is a significant scholarship program," said a public relations official at the organization.

We should not forget the tragedy. Why and how to preserve disaster?

March 29, 2013

Locals divided over 'disaster museum' proposal for Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201303290008>

By YUTAKA SHIOKURA/ Staff Writer

Residents living near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have reacted strongly to a proposal to preserve parts of the site as a cautionary example for future generations.

The proposal includes establishing a sightseeing route there for tourists, in the same way that Chernobyl has become a destination for disaster voyeurs in Ukraine.

Some call it food for thought. Others are disgusted by the notion.

"I don't feel like listening to preserving the plant as a tourist site," said one resident in Minami-Soma, a socially shattered city located 20 to 30 kilometers from the plant. That opinion is one apparently shared by many residents of the city of 65,000 inhabitants.

The proposal's backers, eight Tokyo-based intellectuals, argue that Japan should decide now what it wants to do with the plant 25 years from now.

It is clear why talk of "tourism" might strike a raw nerve in the region.

Although atmospheric radiation release has now diminished, four badly damaged reactor buildings remain fragile and many parts remain largely off-limits to workers. Challenges relate not just to how to decommission the reactors, but also how to dispose of tons of highly radioactive water and debris. And about 160,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture remain away from their homes, a group comprising both mandatory evacuees and those who chose to leave. Many are quartered communally in makeshift accommodation.

But for all the shock presented by this radical proposal, some residents say it is right to think of a way to benefit future generations.

"We should preserve the nuclear complex as a symbol of how we used to be as a people, unable to prevent the accident. And it would be a symbol of our determination to break with a custom of 'burying' trauma," said Keitaro Harasawa, 33, a doctor in Minami-Soma.

But he said the accident remains raw and painful for many people. The population of Minami-Soma is 30 percent smaller than before the disaster, with younger people in particular choosing to build new lives elsewhere.

Among his patients, he said, talk of "tourism" would likely find little enthusiasm.

"Even today, they say they don't even want to see pictures of the crippled plant," he said.

Akihiro Tanaka, 39, who runs a job placement company, said many people there would be uncomfortable with the word "tourism," but he believes bringing in tourists could nevertheless be important. He said he wants a way to show his 2-year-old son that the younger generation will be able to overcome what happened.

"We should not forget the tragedy. We should bounce back and build a Minami-Soma with new ideas," he said. "I would like my son to appreciate us some day, appreciate what we did to make that happen."

One 39-year-old man who wouldn't give his name said the proposal would be one way to preserve the lessons of what happened.

"What I dread most is that the memory of the accident will fade," he said.

He added that if his name were used, he would say something different: that the feelings of affected people should decide the matter.

"Some people may be saddened or even incensed by the proposal," he said.

Nevertheless, he added, an idea floated by outsiders could provide something new and fresh for struggling communities.

The scars of 2011 are particularly visible in the city's Odaka neighborhood. It remains strewn with rubble and trees felled by the tsunami where the water swept in.

Kensuke Tadano, a 30-year-old assemblyman, said preserving the plant could help to bring people together.

He said radiation has thwarted cleanup work and the considerable pain from the disaster itself has now been worsened, he said, by a new sore: resentment between residents over how much damage each sustained and the amounts of compensation offered.

Tadano said many feel their community is falling apart, and in these circumstances preserving the plant for posterity could bring them together again.

"Having a symbol like this would bring down barriers between people," he said.

The proposal's backers say Japan has a unique opportunity to do something meaningful.

One of them is writer and critic Hiroki Azuma. He draws a parallel with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, a UNESCO World Heritage Site instantly recognizable as a symbol of the world's first atomic bombing in 1945.

"Like the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Japan, as a nation forced to confront the dangers of nuclear energy, should pursue the plant's preservation so that it can continue to show the world what happened in this nuclear disaster," he said.

Hideaki Shinoda, an associate professor of peace-building theory at Hiroshima University, said reaching a consensus about preserving the Hiroshima Peace Memorial proved to be a lengthy process. It was only added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in 1996.

Although it is now a global symbol of Hiroshima and a symbol of something far bigger than the city alone, early efforts to preserve it as a legacy of war met opposition.

"It took people in Hiroshima 20 to 30 years to form a consensus about the dome," he said.

But it was not tourism that motivated the city to preserve the dome and create a powerful message for peace, Shinoda said.

"When people have suffered a devastating experience, they want to try to find a positive meaning in it," he said. "It is crucial for victims to give a concrete shape to that urge and to sublimate it."

The Fukushima proposal's backers include sociologist Hiroshi Kainuma, architect Ryuji Fujimura and journalist Daisuke Tsuda. They traveled to the region last year to discuss the proposal with residents.

What they suggest creating is a resort-style base for visitors with the provisional name Fukushima Gate Village.

Lying about 20 kilometers from the plant, it would offer accommodation and facilities such as a museum and a renewable-energy research center.

Visitors would be able to board a bus for a tour of the plant itself, to see it up close and to observe work on decommissioning the reactors.

The group is expected to outline its proposal in greater detail this summer

But are we just talking "rumors"?

March 29, 2013

Radiation rumors trigger expanding Fukushima vegetable price collapse

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130329p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The prices of vegetables produced in Fukushima Prefecture at Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale markets have collapsed in fiscal 2012, two years after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, a Mainichi Shimbun investigation shows.

The Japanese government on April 1, 2012 introduced stringent food safety regulations, setting a radioactive cesium limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram. Despite the new regulations, Fukushima vegetables have taken the brunt of radiation rumors, prices declining even further than they did in fiscal 2011, the first year of the nuclear crisis.

The Mainichi tracked price increase and decrease rates (annual transactions divided by total quantity) of vegetables at the Tokyo wholesale markets by classifying vegetables in four categories -- nationwide, eastern Japan, western Japan and Fukushima -- against the base figures of fiscal 2009.

In fiscal 2011, the prices of vegetables in the first three categories jumped around 4 percent over fiscal 2009, but those of Fukushima vegetables dropped 5 percent. In fiscal 2012, the prices of vegetables in the nationwide category dipped 0.2 percent from fiscal 2009 but the prices of vegetables from Fukushima Prefecture plunged 18.7 percent.

According to 2010 Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry statistics and other sources, over 20 percent of all vegetables shipped from Fukushima Prefecture were traded at the Tokyo wholesale markets.

A vegetable dealer in Tokyo says, "There are no takers (for Fukushima vegetables) even now. Some supermarkets in western Japan don't accept them at all and there are no deals." The dealer criticizes the central government for setting provisional radiation limits even though the effects from radioactive materials are not understood, spreading distrust among consumers. He also says the public does not have any faith in the new regulations.

The government initially set a radioactive cesium limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram shortly after the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis, drawing fire from the public for setting the limit too high. The government later said the new and tougher regulations would bring harmful radiation rumors under control and protect both producers and consumers.

According to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, there were 1,204 cases of food products with radiation levels exceeding the original limit between the March 2011 disasters and the end of March 2012. The ministry logged 2,198 cases of food products exceeding the new limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram between April 2012 and the end of February this year, though many of the cases concerned mushrooms and wild animals.

Kiyokazu Ujiie, assistant professor of agricultural economics at the University of Tsukuba, says the price collapse involving Fukushima vegetables is occurring because consumers are reluctant to buy them and they're diverted to the restaurant and food industries. Consumers still worry about radioactive materials in any quantity and it is not enough to make a perfunctory explanation about the safety of vegetables below the national radiation level. The central government, local governments and producers should fully explain to consumers that vegetable screening on a massive scale have not detected radiation.

Fatigue and poor living conditions kill evacuees

March 29, 2013

Stress causing deaths among Fukushima evacuees

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130330_03.html

Mental and physical stress was the most common cause of death among displaced Fukushima residents following the 2011 disaster, a Japanese government survey revealed. Reconstruction agency officials say

that in most cases people died mainly due to poor health brought on by fatigue and stress from moving to temporary shelters.

The survey found all of the 35 people who died lived in areas designated as no-entry zones after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. The plant was crippled by the devastating March earthquake and tsunami.

The number of deaths was highest among people in their 80s, at 16, followed by 6 each for people in their 60s and 70s.

The survey found that fatigue from poor living conditions was the most dangerous factor, causing 25 deaths. Exhaustion from moving was next. It was responsible for 13 deaths.

Some evacuees had to move to new housing as much as 16 times, while the average was 7 times.

The agency plans to provide mental health support to evacuees, including visits by clinical psychotherapists to temporary housing.

Hikobae in Los Angeles

April 1, 2013

Fukushima play staged in Los Angeles

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130401_14.html

A play that enacts what happened at a Fukushima hospital after the 2011 disaster was staged in Los Angeles on Sunday.

"Hikobae," which means "rebirth" in English, depicts how medical workers at a hospital in Soma City dealt with patients shortly after the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. It also shows firefighters helping people evacuate to safety.

After the performance, an 18-year-old from Soma who lost his firefighter father said he hopes the drama will strike chords among people outside of Japan.

A member of the audience said the play was moving, and reminded her of how hard people are working to recover from the disaster.

The play was first performed in New York last year in March. The 2nd US performance comes in response to calls from disaster survivors for continued efforts to help people in other countries understand what happened.

The play will return to New York, and then transfer to Tokyo and Fukuoka later this month. The organizer says part of the proceeds will be donated to young disaster survivors who lost their parents.

Toshi Shioya, the play's director, says the 2011 disaster is being forgotten quickly and he hopes the performances will help people remember what happened.

Creation of special fishery zone in Miyagi

April 1, 2013

Miyagi Pref. to apply for special fishery zone as part of reconstruction efforts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130401p2a00m0na016000c.html>

SENDAI -- Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai will apply to the central government as early as this month for the creation of a special zone to restore the fishing industry at Momonoura port on the Oshika Peninsula in Ishinomaki by opening up the fishing port to private enterprises, prefectural government sources say.

If things proceed as planned, the proposed special zone will be established in Momonoura port where local fishermen and a trading company specializing in marine products has jointly formed a limited liability company (LLC).

The Miyagi Prefectural Government had initially planned to apply to set up multiple numbers of special zones in 2012 but resistance from the prefecture-wide fishery cooperative caused a delay in making the planned application. The Momonoura port project signals the start of a campaign by Miyagi Prefecture, hard hit by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, to rebuild the fishing industry.

The prefectural government established a regional council on March 27 to be made up of fishermen, the LLC and fishery cooperative representatives to hear their opinions. The council will hold an inaugural meeting on April 4 before the prefectural government formally applies to the central government, the sources say.

Momonoura lost some 60 households to the tsunami. Local fishermen determined that their community cannot survive unless it resumes fishing operations through utilization of private-sector capital. In August last year, the fishermen tied up with Sendai Suisan, a trading house based in the prefectural capital, to establish the LLC, a company of Momonoura oyster farmers, to produce, process and sell oysters. If they get the nod from the central government for the special zone, the LLC will receive the right to fish in September (when the existing fishing licenses are renewed).

The prefectural government made the special fishing zone proposal during a meeting of a reconstruction design council in May 2011. The proposal calls for easing regulations for priority for fishing rights under the Fisheries Act and allowing private firms to obtain fishing rights, in addition to local fishery cooperatives which have monopolized fishing along their respective coastal regions.

Miyagi Prefecture's coastal fishing had been on the wane even before the twin natural disasters due to population outflow and aging of the existing population. Proponents of the special fishing zone proposal say private-capital infusions will not only rebuild but modernize the fishing industry.

But the prefecture-wide fishery cooperative has vigorously protested the proposal, saying giving private firms fishing rights will devastate fishing grounds. The prefectural government has managed to set up only the Momonoura regional council as a model but has been unsuccessful in other fishing ports. Gov. Murai says fishermen can form a value-added mechanism by tying up with the capital-rich private sector and arrest the decline in the fishing industry

Rezoning Namie (near Fukushima Daiichi)

April 1, 2013

Namie residents get to visit home after rezoning

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130401_21.html

Residents of a town in Fukushima Prefecture have been allowed to visit their homes for the first time since the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The daytime visit was granted to people living in 2 of the 3 zones in Namie Town, which the government has redrawn based on radiation levels. The new zoning took effect on Monday. Eighty-three percent of the town's population lives in these 2 zones.

Michio Tanaka and his wife had evacuated to another area in the prefecture. They visited their home to do a clean-up. Tanaka says he is happy to be able to return home but feels sorry for fellow residents who are not yet allowed to do so.

The third zone is home to the remaining 17 percent of the town's population. It is a largely mountainous area and will remain off-limits for the foreseeable future.

Town officials say they hope to make the zone livable in 4 years by providing necessary infrastructure and completing decontamination work.

Twenty-one thousand Namie residents are being forced to live away from home -- the most among municipalities affected by the nuclear accident.

Rezoning of evacuation zones opens up access to Namie

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130401p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The nuclear evacuation zones in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie were realigned into three evacuation zones based on their radiation levels on April 1, opening up access to the homes of some 80 percent of residents -- though not overnight.

According to the government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters and the Namie Town Office, the no-go zone and the planned evacuation zone in Namie, which were designated as such following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, were regrouped into three zones based on their airborne radiation doses as of midnight April 1.

The three new zones are -- "difficult to return areas" in the mostly mountainous western part of the town, where entry is in principle prohibited due to accumulated annual radiation doses of over 50 millisieverts and where residents' permanent return is expected to be achieved in 2017; "residency restriction areas" in the central plain part of the town, with accumulated yearly radiation doses of over 20 to no more than 50 millisieverts; and "areas being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order" in the coastal part of the town, with cumulative annual radiation doses of less than 20 millisieverts. In the latter two areas, residents' permanent return is expected to become possible in 2016.

Because townspeople from areas newly designated as "residency restriction areas" and "areas being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order" account for some 80 percent of Namie's population, or some 16,000, the rezoning allows those residents access to their hometown -- though not overnight. The town's office functions will partially be returned to their original location within what has become "areas being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order" from the prefectural city of Nihonmatsu on April 1.

The move comes a year after the redrawing of evacuation zones began in nuclear disaster-hit areas, with redemarcation completed in nine out of 11 municipalities thus far. However, it is still unknown when residents can permanently return to their homes as the government-led decontamination work in radiation-tainted areas is largely behind schedule, with no prospects of finding a place to set up an interim storage facility for contaminated soil.

The rezoning is aimed at restoring evacuation areas to their original habitable state by lifting the ban on access to areas with lower radiation levels and proceeding with government-led decontamination work, restoration of infrastructure and clean-ups of homes by residents. Starting with the prefectural city of Tamura and the village of Kawauchi on April 1 last year, the rezoning process was completed in the city of

Minamisoma in April last year, the village of Iitate in July last year, the town of Naraha in August last year, the town of Okuma in December last year, and the village of Katsurao and the town of Tomioka, both in March this year.

However, the rezoning process is also likely to prompt residents to leave their hometowns permanently as they struggle to rebuild their lives in areas in which they have been evacuated. The latest rezoning means the start of compensation payments to residents by plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) for their property such as homes and land. "If decontamination work doesn't proceed as scheduled and turns out ineffective, the number of evacuees who purchase their homes using compensation money in areas they are evacuated to will increase," said a senior Namie Municipal Government official.

Meanwhile, the towns of Futaba and Kawamata are also seeking to redraw evacuation zones sometime in April, but stalled coordination of opinions among residents has thrown the target dates up in the air.

The town of Futaba has been riddled with confusion over rezoning following a clash between the former mayor and the town assembly, with residents from coastal areas expected to fall within a "zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order" divided between those who lost their homes to the earthquake and tsunami and those not. Because TEPCO is not paying compensation for property damaged by the quake and tsunami, a man who lost his home to the tsunami complained, "The government says it will enable residents to return home after rezoning, but my family has no home to go back to."

The contradiction boils down to residents eligible for compensation for homes that escaped tsunami and quake damage versus those who lost their homes and are only eligible for compensation for furniture and other household items -- though the latter faces more difficulties in rebuilding their lives. "The rezoning serves no purpose," said a man living in a house rented by authorities in Fukushima Prefecture.

The town of Kawamata, whose Yamakiya district has fallen within a planned evacuation zone, is seeking to regroup the zone into residency restriction areas and planned evacuation areas. However, residents from areas neighboring the town of Namie, where radiation doses still remain high, fear that their hometown will not become safe enough for them to return. Therefore, some residents are demanding that their home districts be regrouped into "difficult to return areas," where residents' permanent return is not possible at least for another five years.

"We'd like to discuss the issue with residents once again in April," said a Kawamata Town Office official.

March 31, 2013

Fukushima's Namie sees no-go zone designation lifted

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/04/01/national/fukushimas-namie-sees-no-go-zone-designation-lifted/#.UVlj7DdsFEs>

NAMIE, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – The no-go zone designation was lifted Monday for the town of Namie near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In line with the move, the Fukushima Prefecture town was realigned into three evacuation zones according to estimated annual radiation doses.

The rezoning lifted restrictions on entry into Namie's eastern coastal area, where 80 percent of the town's population, totaling about 20,000, lived before the March 2011 meltdown catastrophe started at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant. But no residents will be allowed to stay overnight in the area.

Several staff members were set to be stationed at the municipal office starting Monday.

The coastal area was reorganized into two evacuation zones — one with an estimated annual radiation dose of 20 millisieverts or less and the other with between 20 and 50 millisieverts. For those zones, the evacuation advisory is expected to be lifted in 2016.

Restrictions on entry were kept in place for the remaining area, where homecomings will not be allowed at least until 2017 due to high radiation doses, which are estimated at over 50 millisieverts per year.

Namie was the ninth of 11 Fukushima municipalities to undergo such rezoning after they were designated for evacuation because of the nuclear fallout.

Futaba, one of the nuclear plant's two host towns, is the only remaining municipality where the no-go zone designation is still in place.

Govt. rezones Namie Town near Fukushima No.1 plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130401_07.html

The Japanese government has rezoned a town near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant based on the amount of its exposure to radiation.

Namie Town was reclassified into 3 zones on Monday. Its 21,000 residents have been living outside the town since it was declared a no-entry zone.

The coastal, central area as well as western parts of the town, are areas where residents are now allowed to visit their homes during the daytime. A police checkpoint there was dismantled.

About 83 percent of the town's residents lived in those areas before the nuclear disaster in March of 2011.

The remaining 17 percent of the residents lived in mountainous areas where entry is still banned. Those areas have been declared unsuitable for living indefinitely.

Namie is the 9th municipality in Fukushima Prefecture to be rezoned. The government plans to rebuild

infrastructure and decontaminate the areas so that residents can return within 3 or 4 years.

The mayor of Namie Town said that he has mixed feelings about the town being divided, but said the lifting of the no-entry ban is a step forward.

170 km of cherry trees in Tohoku

April 2, 2013

Cherry trees to mark tsunami line in Tohoku as warning to future generations

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201304020157>

By TATEKI IWAI/ Staff Writer

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--Years from now, 17,000 cherry trees will mark a 170-kilometer stretch of the Tohoku region that was devastated by the March 11, 2011, tsunami disaster.

Disaster survivors and volunteers formed a nonprofit organization called Sakura Line 311 to plant trees at 10-meter intervals, along the farthest points inland that the waves reached.

The group was set up by eight youngsters with the aim of warning future generations about the dangers of tsunami.

After the disaster, Takumi Hashizume, the 36-year-old NPO chief, came across ancient stone markers engraved with characters warning future generations "not to build homes beyond this point."

Markers were found along the Sanriku coast, which extends from southern Aomori Prefecture through Iwate Prefecture and northern Miyagi Prefecture, a clear sign that devastating tsunami had hit in the distant past.

Hashizume concluded it would be easier to remember these warnings if cherry trees, which blossom briefly in spring, marked the spots, hit by the tsunami in 2011.

Starting from a tree planted in a temple on elevated ground about 2 km from the shore in November 2011, some 950 volunteers have undertaken tree planting on more than 10 occasions to date. So far, several types of cherry tree, totaling 520, have been planted. Group members said trees were selected that could withstand the harsh winter environment in Tohoku.

The group's support network is growing nationwide, with donations and offers of trees pouring in to the NPO.

The group is keen to emphasize that its goal of planting trees over such a wide area is a long-term project. "But that's what makes the project so worthwhile," Hashizume said. "As our activities continue, people will be reminded that tsunami are scary."

First public housing unit in Miyagi since 3/11

April 2, 2013

Miyagi opens first post-3/11 housing

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/04/02/national/miyagi-opens-first-post-311-housing/#.UVqXxjdsFEs>

SENDAI – A ceremony was held Monday in Miyagi Prefecture to mark the completion of the first public housing units to be built after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

In a ceremony held in the town of Yamamoto, Mayor Toshio Saito handed over the keys to nine households who survived and were screened to ensure they were eligible for public housing.

Kiyoshi Shimada, 74, who received one of the keys, said he is looking forward to leaving his one-room temporary housing unit and moving into his new two-bedroom house in early May.

He also said he hopes to get along with his neighbors, since he will be living alone.

Fumiko Abe, 50, who will move into one of the new units with her mother and sister, checked out their three-bedroom house after receiving the keys to the property.

As of Monday, 18 houses had been completed in Yamamoto, 12 units in Sendai and 50 in the city of Ishinomaki.

The Miyagi Prefectural Government plans to complete about 16,000 houses for disaster victims by March 2016.

Still hoping

April 2, 2013

Tsunami survivor keeps searching for missing family

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201304020238

By SHINICHI FUJIWARA/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Kneeling among brown weeds and scattered debris, Miho Suzuki, 24, placed a bouquet of flowers on the remains of the home she shared with her parents and brother in the Ukedo district of Namie.

Then she began searching.

Suzuki's father, Fumio, and mother, Toshiyo, then aged 63 and 60 respectively, have been missing since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami devastated the port town.

"I want to find their remains and raise a tomb in Namie for them," Suzuki said.

April 1 was her first chance to do so. That day, the government lifted the entry restrictions it had imposed due to high radiation levels from the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, just a few kilometers away.

"I have no clues, but I cannot help but search for them," Suzuki said, looking under a collapsed levee, between pieces of debris and anywhere else she could reach.

At the time of the disaster, Suzuki was working in a clothing store in Minami-Soma, a neighboring city to the north of Namie, in the same prefecture.

She tried to drive home but was stopped at an intersection near her house by local fire brigade members. "Ukedo has vanished," they said. Her house was located only 100 meters from the port.

The next morning, with an explosion occurring at the nuclear plant that she used to see every day, Suzuki was evacuated to a mountainous district in Namie. She was given no time to look for her family.

She started her lone life as an evacuee there without seeing her house even once following the earthquake and tsunami.

In mid-April 2011, her brother Kiyotaka, then aged 24, was found dead on a road about 300 meters from their home. His car was parked in the yard.

Suzuki thinks her parents were both at home with Kiyotaka because her mother and father did not have driver's licenses.

"It is a blessed relief that my family stayed together in their last moments," she said.

For now, time seems to have stood still in Ukedo, with washed-up fishing boats and the bare steel frames of buildings still dotting the landscape. Exhaust stacks of the crippled power plant loom in the distance.

"Everything remains the same as the day the tsunami hit," Suzuki said. "Nothing has changed."

But as evacuation zones are reviewed and a path to residents returning to Fukushima becoming clear, debris removal work is beginning in earnest.

Suzuki has mixed feelings, swaying between delight that her hometown is recovering from the disaster and her own hope of finding her parents' remains, even if they are only small pieces.

"I feel as if (the clearance work) will remove even the traces and bones of my parents," she said.

Suzuki said she will continue her search. But she added that even if radiation levels in Namie fall enough to live there safely, she will not return, because her family is not there.

Not everybody wants to return

April 4, 2013

Schoolchildren who evacuated from Minamisoma reluctant to return

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130404p2a00m0na019000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- Many schoolchildren who have evacuated from this city hit hard by the nuclear disaster have still not returned due largely to their parents' concerns about radiation contamination, a local education board said.

The Minamisoma Municipal Board of Education has vowed to step up efforts to help schoolchildren taking shelter outside the city return home.

"I think this is because schoolchildren have got used to their life at schools in areas where they are taking shelter. However, we're determined to continue our efforts to create an environment in which children can study in the city without concern," said an education board official.

Of 3,603 children who are supposed to attend municipal elementary schools in Minamisoma this academic year, only 2,020, or 56 percent, are expected to be actually enrolled in these schools as of April 8, according to a survey conducted by the municipal board of education. At junior high schools, 1,259 of 1,873 students, or 67 percent, are estimated to be attending the institutions.

In total, 3,279 of 5,476 schoolchildren will be attending municipal elementary and junior high schools. The other students are attending schools in areas where they are taking shelter although they are registered as Minamisoma residents.

The retention rates were 30 percent at municipal elementary schools and 43 percent at city-run junior high schools as of April 22, 2011, shortly after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. The figures rose to 50 percent and 64 percent at elementary and junior high schools, respectively, at the beginning of the academic year for 2012.

Volunteer group organises events in support of Fukushima

Student volunteer group opens cafe in Shibuya for one day to support Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130404p2a00m0na002000c.html>

A youth volunteer group opened a cafe in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward on April 3 for one day only to support Fukushima Prefecture, which is still suffering from harmful rumors after the nuclear power plant disaster in March 2011.

Aibe Fukushima, a volunteer group made up of college students in the metropolitan area, was first established as a project of a college club at Aoyama Gakuin University in July 2011 and became an

independent volunteer group in March 2012. "Aibe" means "let's go" in the dialect of the Aizu region of Fukushima Prefecture. Currently, some 20 members, mostly from universities in Tokyo, are participating in the group's volunteer work.

The cafe's signature menu item, called "Kozuyu Curry," featured Aizu's local ingredients often seen on ceremonial occasions. Bacon and daikon radish were used in the dish to match the taste of the curry. Another popular item was the strawberry smoothie made with locally grown strawberries from the city of Shirakawa provided by Japan Agriculture and other affiliates. The cafe's 20 seats were packed throughout the day.

Aibe Fukushima also plans tours to Fukushima Prefecture. The group holds various events targeting young people and introduces fun ways to support the region. Last fall, the group participated in a 400-year-old flaming torch event in the city of Sukagawa.

Emi Kanari, 20, a third-year student at Waseda University who was the cafe's manager for the day, is from Sukagawa. She experienced the quake in her hometown two years ago. "I wanted to get out of my hometown when I lived there," said Kanari, but after showing her hometown to the group's members she has reconsidered her opinion about the town and appreciates the warmth of Fukushima people.

While half of the student volunteers are from Fukushima Prefecture, the group's founder and leader Ayano Itasato, a 22-year-old, fourth-year student at Aoyama Gakuin University, had no ties to the region. She decided to establish a volunteer group when she saw on the news that harmful rumors from the nuclear plant disaster were damaging farmers in Fukushima. She has been to Fukushima more than 10 times and has fallen in love with the prefecture.

Itasato said that through her trips to Fukushima she has also identified other problems communities are facing that are not related to the nuclear plant disaster such as depopulation. "I want to continue to visit the prefecture even after disaster recovery is completed. I hope people will also fall in love with Fukushima," she said. The group is planning a farm tour for this summer.

Household power rate increase officially accepted

Govt OK's power rate hikes for 2 utilities

April 3, 2013

<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000103408>

[Jiji Press]

The government Tuesday approved plans by Kansai Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. to raise household electricity rates by 9.75 percent and 6.23 percent, respectively.

The increases, to come into effect in May, will be the first full-scale power rate hikes by the two utilities in 33 years.

The monthly electricity bill for an average household will rise by 643 yen in Kansai Electric's service area and by 362 yen in Kyushu Electric's area.

Ichiro Takahara, director general of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency, handed letters of approval to Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi and Kyushu Electric President Michiaki Uriu.

Kansai Electric and Kyushu Electric initially applied for respective rate increases of 11.88 percent and 8.51 percent. But the Economic, Trade and Industry Ministry on Friday instructed them to reduce the margin of hikes by cutting fuel, labor and materials costs further. The two companies also trimmed the margins of rate hikes for corporate users to 17.26 percent from 19.23 percent at Kansai Electric, and to 11.94 percent from 14.22 percent at Kyushu Electric. A rate change for corporate users does not require regulatory approval, but the utilities took into account the government's desire to curb user burdens.

As the two companies lowered the size of the rate hikes, their revenues are expected to fall by 47 billion yen at Kansai Electric and 30 billion yen at Kyushu Electric. The utilities plan to recoup the declines by streamlining their operations.

In memory of all firefighters : A nice story

April 7, 2013

Parents of firefighters lost in 3/11, 9/11 share memories

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201304070018

By DAISUKE NAKAI/ Correspondent

NEW YORK--Shintaro and Yoko Abe lost their son, Kenichi, when the 39-year-old volunteer firefighter died trying to help people escape the 2011 tsunami in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture.

New Yorker Lee Ielpi's son, Jonathan, was killed when the 29-year-old firefighter was helping in relief efforts at ground zero after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

Separated by an ocean and disasters 10 years apart, the three parents met in the Big Apple on April 5 to offer each other support and discuss the importance of firefighters.

The meeting was the idea of Toshi Shioya, director of a play titled "Hikobae" (New shoots). A joint Japanese-U.S. production, the drama is set in a Soma hospital during the chaotic period after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck on March 11, 2011, when people were scurrying to evacuate to higher ground before the advancing tsunami.

Among the play's characters is a volunteer fire brigade member who urges people to flee, but who himself gets swept away in the waves.

Shioya invited the Abes and Ielpi to attend his play's April 5 performance in New York after he reflected on the similar roles played by firefighters on 9/11 and 3/11.

Yoko Abe, who visited the 9/11 memorial monument in New York with Ielpi, said she realized the parents all shared strong emotional ties.

"I want to live every single day of my life to the fullest," she said.

Ielpi said his son was always eager to help other people--the duty of a firefighter.

A happi coat of the volunteer fire brigade, which Kenichi wore when the tsunami hit, was used as a stage costume during the play's New York performance.

"I dedicate today's performance to the memories of firefighters who perished on 9/11 and 3/11, so that their passion will not be forgotten," Shioya said.

For a related story, visit (http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201303080011)

Community-based initiatives much to be preferred

April 7, 2013

POINT OF VIEW/ Daniel P. Aldrich: Bottom-up initiatives needed to move forward after 3/11

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/opinion/AJ201304070014>

SPECIAL TO AJW

More than two years after the 3/11 disaster, a tremendous amount of tsunami debris remains uncollected throughout Japan's Tohoku region. In municipalities like Rikuzentakata, Kamaishi and Ofunato that were slammed by the massive tsunami, only 37 percent of the concrete, debris and household materials that litter the ground has been picked up so far.

As locals ponder whether to exit their often isolated, low-quality temporary housing to move inland toward cities like Morioka and Sendai, they look closely at the conditions in the area. Aesthetics matter to residents who remain undecided about whether to rebuild their wrecked homes or move on to greener pastures.

The inaction is partly due to cities, towns and villages being plagued by bureaucratic gridlock; many local communities have not yet reached agreement on issues such as collective housing relocation, with younger residents seeking to move to higher ground and older ones hoping to remain by the ocean.

One estimate by the Reconstruction Agency is that only half of 60 or so districts have agreed on land readjustment issues some two years after the disaster. Beyond the lack of agreement on what to do next, recent quantitative surveys (March 2013) carried out by the National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) underscored tremendous obstacles to efficient recovery. Among the problems documented in the NIRA reports were a lack of recovery in local industries, such as mining and manufacturing, and a large out-migration of young people from Fukushima Prefecture.

Against this backdrop, in discussions with local government officials, residents and NGOs alike, I heard many people expressing their belief that the recovery process--despite a tremendous amount of money being pumped into it--feels stalled. This may be because much of the more than 20 trillion yen set aside by the central government in budgets over five years has gone toward large-scale public works projects that are unrelated to the disaster.

That is, much of the funding is paying for the kind of pork-barrel projects, such as bridges, ports and roads to nowhere, which characterized Japan's political economy for much of the late 20th century. These big projects were already being planned by central government ministries, such as the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and were simply dusted off or revived with the new influx of cash post-3/11.

While new infrastructure will be of some short-term help (because of the construction jobs it creates), new buildings and physical structures alone will not assist the long-term recovery of these tsunami-affected communities.

Instead of the government-initiated large-scale projects, what is needed are bottom-up, community-based initiatives. Fortunately, there are some great examples of such programs that are happening on the ground, and several NGOs have worked closely with local communities in Tohoku to understand their goals for recovery and then continue as partners to achieve them.

The Ibasho project in Ofunato in Iwate Prefecture, under the direction of Emi Kiyota, for example, is breaking ground on a new project, called the Ibasho Cafe. The structure is located in the center of town next to a large block of temporary housing occupied by hundreds of survivors. The Ibasho Cafe will be managed and run by elderly community residents and will provide a meeting spot and cafe for community members of all ages.

Elderly tsunami survivors and residents have served as active participants throughout the process of planning, designing, constructing, managing and operating the cafe. Soon after the disaster, Emi and other project organizers heard various stories from the elderly and the younger generation about seniors who saved younger people's lives by instructing them on where to escape and teaching them how to survive with extremely limited resources following the tsunami. Older people also expressed a great deal of gratitude for all the assistance they had received, and wanted to give back to and be part of community life.

The Ibasho project seeks to simultaneously provide a meeting space in a period when most families are cooped up in trailers and a way to foster the deepening of social bonds that have proved critical for resilience.

Another new bottom-up project has been created by the Japanese branch of the well-known organization Habitat for Humanity. Along with their standard procedure of providing hundreds of hours of volunteer labor to help locals in Tohoku rebuild their homes, Habitat has created a program to provide grants to selected families in need of financial assistance along with an innovative way to leveraging the new feed-in tariff (FIT).

The FIT was designed to encourage home owners and large-scale corporations alike to embrace renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, and helps lock in higher prices for electricity even for small-scale producers. Habitat is helping families install solar panels on their homes and on community centers to provide not only a source of power should another disaster strike the area, but also a small but steady stream of income thanks to the largesse of the central government.

One final project that has focused on the revitalization of local communities has come from the Sankaku Planning Iwate Project known as the Delivery Care project. By hiring unemployed local women to provide assistance to others who cannot go shopping themselves--because of pregnancy, illness or disability--the project provides both employment and social connections to those who need them.

Many of the elderly community residents in these Tohoku communities feel disconnected from friends and loved ones in their temporary shelters, and many women in the community have been unable to find employment because of the economic downturn of the area. In the communities of Miyako, Oda, Otsuchi and Ofunato, among others, this project has leveraged local needs into a positive force for change.

Top-down planning and large-scale projects describe the ways that most countries--advanced industrial democracies like Japan included--operate following crises. Regrettably, these sorts of plans have failed again and again. The current stagnation of Japan's recovery can be overcome with creative, bottom-up approaches based not on pre-existing national plans but rather very local, focused ones. Grounded in the community, these initiatives have the power to push Japan forward.

We can only hope that the Japanese government itself will recognize the capacity of these initiatives and divert some of its funding from public works projects to local, innovative ones.

Daniel P. Aldrich, associate professor of public policy at Purdue University, is the author of "Site Flights" (Cornell University Press 2010) and "Building Resilience" (University of Chicago Press 2012) and was an AAAS Fellow at USAID in 2012-2013. He is currently a Fulbright research professor at Tokyo University and a member of the Mansfield U.S.-Japan Network for the Future.

Mayor of Namie : Please help

April 8, 2013

Mayor of Namie asks for cooperation in disaster recovery



Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba speaks at a symposium on the town's recovery from the nuclear disaster in Tama, western Tokyo, on April 6. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130408p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The mayor of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie, hit hard by the March 2011 outbreak of the nuclear crisis, has criticized the government and the nuclear plant operator for failing to minimize the damage, and has asked for help in its disaster recovery efforts.

"The government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) failed to provide us with any information or to save the lives of those who could've been saved, which led to an expansion of the damage. It's unforgivable," Mayor Tamotsu Baba told a symposium on the current situation and prospects for Namie in Tama, western Tokyo, on April 6.

"Two years have passed since the outbreak of the disaster and we finally appear to be approaching a neutral situation after being negative for so long. However, much of the rubble still remains in the town and we're about to launch full-scale recovery efforts. I'd like to ask you for help," he said.

About 100 people, including Tama Mayor Hiroyuki Abe and local residents, attended the symposium organized by the owners of shops around Seiseki-Sakuragaoka Station on the Keio Line.

"We'd like to support the town's recovery efforts to prevent the memory of the disaster from fading," said one of the organizers.

No power saving this summer

April 9, 2013

Government won't request electricity-saving efforts this summer

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304090036>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

For the first time since the Fukushima nuclear disaster started, the government will not ask people to save electricity this summer because utilities are expected to have sufficient supplies, sources said April 8.

Supply is expected to exceed demand by 6.3 percent on a nationwide average, excluding Okinawa Prefecture, even if all idled nuclear reactors remain offline.

Electric power companies have been increasing thermal power generation while energy-saving efforts of residents and companies have spread since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry on April 9 is scheduled to hold a subcommittee meeting to check the supply-demand situation for this summer after electric power companies show their prospects. The government will make a final decision as early as this month on its plan to not request electricity-saving efforts this summer, the sources said.

The Fukushima nuclear accident led to the government's decision to halt operations at all nuclear reactors in Japan to ensure their safety. For two summers and two winters, the government has urged some regions to conserve electricity.

In summer 2012, the government asked specific regions to save electricity by certain percentages, including 15 percent in Kansai.

In the 2012-13 winter, the government asked users in Hokkaido to save electricity by 7 percent.

Before the disaster, Kansai Electric Power Co. depended on nuclear power generation for much of its electricity supply. The No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the company's Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture are the only ones in the nation currently in operation.

If Kansai Electric cannot put other nuclear reactors online, its supply of the electricity will still exceed demand from its users by 3.0 percent, the sources said.

For the three utilities in eastern Japan, Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Tokyo Electric Power Co., their supply is expected to exceed demand by 6.7 percent on average.

Fukushima charity ride

April 13, 2013

Tokyo Brits gear up for three-day charity cycle ride to Fukushima

by Morichika Nakamoto

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/04/13/general/tokyo-brits-gear-up-for-three-day-charity-cycle-ride-to-fukushima/#.UWhWsEpsFEs>

"Ten Brits, 10 Bikes, 300 km, 3 days . . ." — a group of British expats living in Tokyo will saddle up for a charity cycle ride this month to the disaster-stricken city of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, in the sort of fundraising drive that is common back home.

"People (in Japan) will say: 'Why are you cycling? I'll give you the money anyway,'" Robert Williams, 47, who launched Tokyo Brits earlier this year, said. "In Britain, people will give you the money only if you are going to do it. Some won't even give it to you until you've done it! It's just a different way of thinking."

The newly formed group, consisting of 10 members in their 40s and 50s who work in financial planning, recruitment and event management, came about through their shared interest in cycling.

Via its website — tokyobrits.com — the team has successfully collected ¥1 million in donations so far.

“If you take part in a cycle ride or run a marathon, you would always get sponsorship in the U.K.,” said Nick Rees, a 40-year-old Tokyo Brits member. “You put yourself through pain but you know you can raise money through friends and family, and companies.”

The cyclists have received backing from Wiggle Ltd., a leading British online cycling store that donated all the jerseys for the ride, as well as from global logistics company DHL International GmbH, which will provide two support vehicles to accompany the group en route to Fukushima, in addition to making a \$2,000 (roughly ¥200,000) donation.

The team’s first-ever ride will serve as one of the bigger events for the Save Minamisoma Project, a fundraising campaign for the coastal city, which is located just north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power station and was devastated by both the natural and nuclear disasters of March 2011. With some parts of the city lying within the 20-km evacuation zone around the No. 1 plant, nearly 17,000 of its 46,000 residents have evacuated and about 5,600 are still living in temporary housing.

The Minamisoma project was launched mainly by foreign volunteers soon after the 3/11 catastrophe to directly provide relief supplies to local residents, as few volunteers were deployed to Minamisoma amid high radiation levels, according to the organizers. Members of the project have delivered food and water to the city more than 40 times since three of the Fukushima No. 1 complex’s reactors experienced core meltdowns, showering the surrounding area with radioactive fallout.

Having traveled to Minamisoma and other disaster-hit areas as a project member to deliver fresh vegetables, chiefly to the elderly, Rees said he feels they are “not forgotten but are in very difficult conditions without charitable donations like this,” given that many are still without transport and find it hard to get to the nearest stores.

Setting off April 19, the Tokyo Brits team will peddle around 150 km on the first day of the tour before covering 90 km the following day, including a tough 30-km mountainous leg so as to avoid the no-go zone. They will cycle 85 km on the final day.

To achieve their goal, the members have engaged in rigorous training sessions, such as 60-km rides along Tokyo’s Tama River. “We’ve all been out on weekends and training pretty hard. Four of us did the first leg to Hitachi (Ibaraki Prefecture) a couple of weeks ago, actually, and it went fine,” Rees said.

Some are experienced cyclists, but a few only started donning Lycra after talk of the trip came up. “We talked about using our common interest in a positive way for a good charitable cause,” he said.

Given that residents in temporary accommodations in Minamisoma are still reliant on deliveries, which they have to line up for in advance, Williams said: “It’s kind of shocking for us that we’re still having to do this two years later. People shouldn’t be denied food and water.

“We know the money is not going into a big hole,” he said. “Lots of people donated money after the tsunami but there seems to be lots of political red tape. There’s no messing about with this project —it goes straight to them and buys the food.”

With the effort largely expat-driven so far, the group hopes to see more Japanese coming onboard. “There are a lot of Japanese volunteers helping in the area, giving out food, and it’s great, but I wonder in what other ways people outside (Tohoku) have been trying to help,” Rees said.

The team will use Facebook and Twitter to keep followers up to date on their progress, and there are plans for more events in the future as they look to attract female riders, as well as a more diverse mix of nationalities.

“I’d like the ride to be an annual thing but hope it won’t be to give relief to the people in Tohoku, because the government should be doing that. We want them to be self-sufficient,” Williams said. “At the end of the day, we’re doing this for fun, but we take what we are doing for these people seriously.”

Will it be safe?

April 12, 2013

Fukushima farmers to grow 1st rice since accident

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130412_27.html

Farmers in a town in Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan, are preparing to plant their first rice since the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant 2 years ago.

An agricultural corporation in Hirono Town started planting rice early this week. Seeds planted on Monday already have 2-centimeter shoots.

Local farmers were unable to grow rice in the past 2 years because the town asked them not to because of concerns about radioactive contamination.

The town planted rice on an experimental basis last year and confirmed that its radiation levels were below the government limit.

Rice planting is scheduled for early May in about half of the town's 210 hectares of paddies.

The head of the corporation, Yoshiyuki Haga, said finally **growing rice again means getting their hometown back**, so he wants to plant more.

About 5,200 residents of the town evacuated after the nuclear accident. **Only around 10 percent have returned.**

Agriculture used to be the town's key industry. Town officials hope that resuming rice farming will help speed up post-disaster reconstruction.

But will they be able to attend classes there one day?

April 13, 2013

Students take bittersweet tour of school near Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304130050>

By TATSUYA SASAKI/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--The cherry blossoms are in full bloom on the campus of Odaka Technical High School, but the school bell has been silent, the gymnasium empty, and the sounds of slamming lockers and cheerful cacophony of teenagers on their way to classes cannot be heard.

That changed a bit on April 12 when 79 third-year students visited what should have been their place of study in their high school years in this coastal town.

The students had passed the entrance exam for the the school located on the Yoshina no oka highland--famous for its cherry trees--but the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake changed everything.

As the crisis at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant unfolded, the school became off-limits as it fell within the designated no-entry zone. The Odaka Technical High School hopefuls were sent off to study at other high schools or temporary buildings set up in the city outside the no-entry zone.

But with the no-entry designation lifted and temporary visits now allowed, the 79 students visited the school for the first time on April 12. Under a pink canopy of cherry blossoms, their chatter and happy voices brought new life to the school grounds--and wistful thoughts of what might have been.

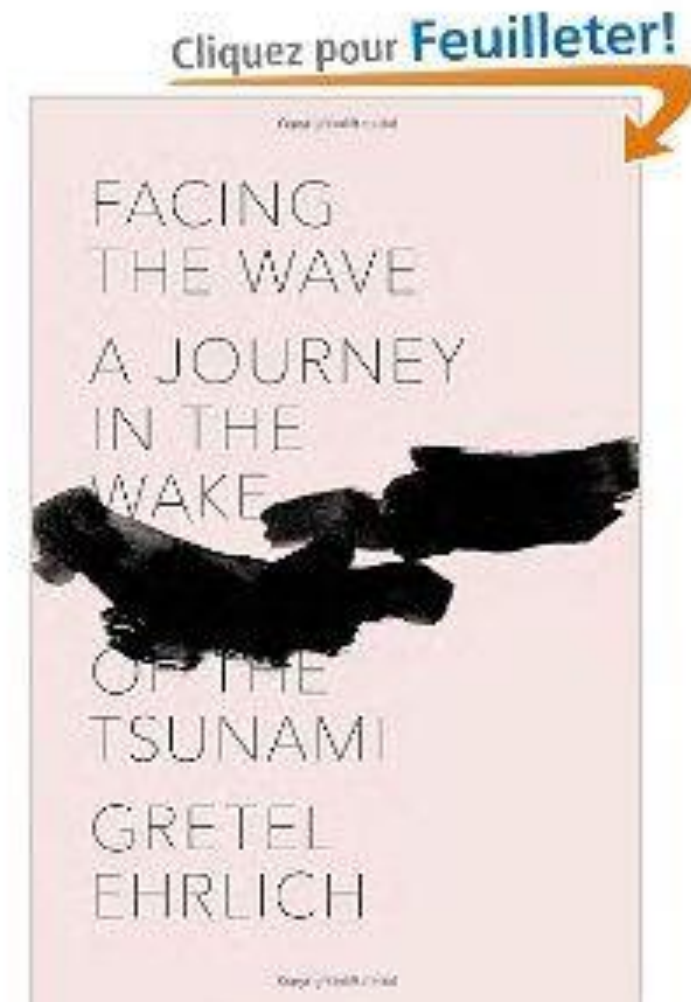
"We chose this time of year so we could see the school's cherry blossoms in full bloom," said Masatoshi Sato, a teacher who helped organize the visit.

Although the grounds were overgrown with weeds and the gym--a former evacuation center--was littered with plastic bottles and trash, it did not hamper the enthusiasm of the students.

About 15 kilometers north of the crippled Fukushima plant, visits to the area are still limited. On this day, the students stayed at the school for about an hour. Prospects for reopening the school remain dim, and it appears unlikely that the third-year students will ever be able to attend classes there. But still, they are hopeful.

"We want to work hard hoping our juniors will be able to return here," said Yusaku Hayashi, student body president.

Facing the wave - Triple horror



Facing the wave: A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami

By Gretel Ehrlich, Pantheon

Feb.12, 2013 (Review of Amazon.fr)

A passionate student of Japanese poetry, theater, and art for much of her life, Gretel Ehrlich felt compelled to return to the earthquake-and-tsunami-devastated Tohoku coast to bear witness, listen to survivors, and experience their terror and exhilaration in villages and towns where all shelter and hope seemed lost. In an eloquent narrative that blends strong reportage, poetic observation, and deeply felt reflection, she takes us into the upside-down world of northeastern Japan, where nothing is certain and where the boundaries between living and dying have been erased by water.

The stories of rice farmers, monks, and wanderers; of fishermen who drove their boats up the steep wall of the wave; and of an eighty-four-year-old geisha who survived the tsunami to hand down a song that only she still remembered are both harrowing and inspirational. Facing death, facing life, and coming to terms with impermanence are equally compelling in a landscape of surreal desolation, as the ghostly specter of Fukushima Daiichi, the nuclear power complex, spews radiation into the ocean and air. *Facing the Wave* is a testament to the buoyancy, spirit, humor, and strong-mindedness of those who must find their way in a suddenly shattered world.

Not this summer

April 17, 2013

Gov't may not request power-saving across Japan this summer

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130417p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The government is considering forgoing asking companies and households throughout Japan to cut electricity use this summer because of the prospects of stable and sufficient power supply meeting the season's expected peak electricity demand.

Entrenched public awareness regarding energy-saving measures and enhanced thermal power generation are expected to ensure sufficient electricity supply this summer. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, the government issued energy-saving requests to companies and households across the country with numerical targets for the summer and winter seasons of 2011 and 2012.

This summer, however, the government will likely be able to avoid issuing such requests even for such regions as Kansai and Kyushu that were more dependent on nuclear power than other regions. The government has estimated that fuel costs will increase by 3.8 trillion yen in fiscal 2013 from the fiscal 2010 level registered before the earthquake disaster. On the backdrop of a weaker yen against the U.S. dollar and other foreign currencies, the fuel cost is likely to further increase by 700 billion yen in fiscal 2013 from the fiscal 2012 level.

At a meeting of the Electric Power Supply and Demand Verification Subcommittee held on the morning of April 17, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry presented a report on the prospect of supply and demand for energy for this summer.

The so-called "supply reserve ratio," the indicator of surplus energy supply above the assumed maximum energy demand, stands at an average of 6.3 percent. The ratio for August this year stands at 3 percent for Kansai and 3.1 percent for Kyushu -- slightly above the 3 percent that is considered necessary to ensure stably energy supply. But the figures are based on the same level of power demand as what was registered in the scorching summer of 2010, and power companies will presumably be able to make up for shortfalls by securing electricity from other utility firms.

Therefore, the government judged that it would not need to issue energy-saving requests with numerical targets.

Electricity costs were calculated on the assumption that power to be generated by nuclear reactors will remain at the same level as that of fiscal 2012 and the yen will be traded at 100 yen to the U.S. dollar. As for the estimated fuel costs for fiscal 2013, the industry ministry expects the figure to increase by 3.8 trillion yen from the fiscal 2010 level. Because import prices are set to rise due to the weaker yen, the margin of increase in fuel costs in fiscal 2013 from the fiscal 2010 level is expected to expand more than 20 percent from the increase of 3.1 trillion yen for fiscal 2012.

The breakdown of the margins of increase in fuel cost are as follows: Thermal power generation -- 2.4 trillion yen for oil; 1.6 trillion yen for liquefied natural gas (LNG); and 0.1 trillion yen for coal. Meanwhile, the fuel cost for nuclear power generation is set to drop by 0.3 trillion yen.

The report says that the government will urge power companies to cut down on fuel costs. It then says, "It will be unavoidable for the public to bear a certain level (of extra costs)." In the report, the industry minister sought public understanding of higher power charges because of the system of passing on higher fuel costs to electricity charges.

The Electric Power Supply and Demand Verification Subcommittee is set to compile a report at its next meeting, and the government plans to make a final decision on energy-saving measures for the summer by the end of this month.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (1 & 2)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (2): Daughter tells father, 'You are stupid'

April 24, 2013

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the second part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

In the morning on March 12, 2011, a day after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami wreaked havoc, a police officer in protective gear was telling people from his patrol car, "Please evacuate immediately."

At that time, the officer never referred to the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Veterinarian Seido Watanabe of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, had spent the previous night with his wife and daughters in their car as the huge tsunami flowed in a river upward and reached the area in front of their house, which is situated on a hill.

At night on March 11, the government issued a declaration that said an emergency situation had occurred in a nuclear power plant. However, news of the declaration did not reach Watanabe.

"Despite that the huge tsunami has receded, why do we have to evacuate now?" he wondered.

Thinking that he would soon be allowed to return to his home, he planned to evacuate without bringing even a change of underwear with him.

Then, his second daughter, Reina, a third-year junior high school student, said, "Let's bring Ponyo with us." She wanted to take the family's pregnant pet dog with them. The dog was expected to give birth to her first puppies the next day through a Caesarean operation.

But Watanabe told her immediately, "We will not bring the dog with us."

At that time, his animal hospital near their home had 17 dogs and cats. He was not able to put all of them in his car. As a veterinarian, it was impossible to bring only his pet dogs with him, while leaving all the other dogs and cats in the hospital.

"You are stupid, stupid. You should die," Reina told him crying. Then, she refused to speak to her father.

The family evacuated to Kawauchi village, where he learned for the first time that an accident had occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. After that, the family continued to move around to various evacuation locations. His hopes of being able to return home soon were shattered.

When Watanabe temporarily returned to his house on March 19 with a firm resolve, five of the dogs and cats in his hospital had already died. They had apparently been unable to survive a week due to old age or poor health.

One of the five was a Labrador retriever, from which he had removed its spleen the previous month. As the postoperative condition of the dog was good, it was difficult for him to convey news of its death to its owner.

However, he called owners of all of the five dogs and cats and told them about the death of their pets. One of the owners came to his animal hospital immediately after he left there, but failed to see his pet.

None of the five owners criticized Watanabe directly. However, one of them asked him, "Wasn't it possible to come back for the dogs and cats a little sooner?"

He apologized to the owner with his eyes full of tears.

The owners of the dogs and cats that have survived have evacuated to municipalities throughout the country. Only Watanabe could continue to care for their pets. He relocated them in several trips, and is

now keeping them in a borrowed shed in Miharu, also in Fukushima Prefecture, where his wife's parents' house is located.

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (1): Veterinarian finds puppy amid Fukushima nuke crisis

April 22, 2013

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201304220001

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the first part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

There were many lives lost in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and the evacuation that followed the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

But veterinarian Seido Watanabe saved one life that was within his power.

On March 19, 2011, Watanabe, 53, of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, cried out loudly in joy on a hill where his house stands: "Woo-yay!"

At that time, he was holding a puppy that had just been born. Toward the central area of the town, he raised the tiny animal and let out a shout with all his might.

"Tokyo Electric Power Co., look at this puppy. Even in a situation like this, an animal is alive. I will also rise up and reconstruct this town by all means," Watanabe thought.

The town of Tomioka is host to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant. In addition, his house is located only seven kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which suffered the accident following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami. Watanabe evacuated the next day, on March 12. He would not return to his home until March 19, a week later.

At the time of the evacuation, he did not take with him his own pet dogs or about 20 dogs and cats in his animal hospital, thinking that he would be able to soon return. However, the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant was not likely to be quickly resolved.

Though he feared that another explosion could occur at the plant, he risked returning to his home, thinking that unless he did so, all of the dogs and the cats would weaken and eventually die.

After driving into Tomioka, he passed through a local attraction--a road lined with 2,000 cherry trees. When he turned a corner, he could see his house and the animal hospital on the hill.

Before the disaster, his pets dogs—French bulldogs named Chester and Ponyo—often greeted him excitedly when he sounded the horn of his car about several hundred meters before pulling into his house. On March 19, he hit the horn for longer than before while thinking that all of the dogs and cats had probably died.

On the day of the evacuation, he put out more food than usual. But he failed to prepare water due to the water system being cut off.

"It will be impossible for them to survive," he thought.

After arriving at his house, however, he found white and black “lumps” moving in a corner of the garden. They were Chester and Ponyo, without a doubt.

He could not bring himself to believe that they were still alive. The two were barking fanatically. Though they looked weakened, they happily wagged their tails.

Ponyo was pregnant when Watanabe had evacuated. However, her belly had become flat, so he thought that she must have given birth to her puppies. When he looked for them in the garden, he found only one. A black puppy was lying on a glove in a space between the doghouse and a wall of the animal hospital. He did not know where Ponyo had found the glove.

The puppy’s eyes were closed. It was apparent that it was unable to take breast milk from Ponyo because its body was cold and dried up. If Watanabe had returned to the house a day later, the puppy would have undoubtedly died.

When Ponyo was pregnant, Watanabe did an ultrasonography check of her body. At that time, he confirmed the presence of two puppies. He looked for the other puppy in the garden but could not find it, and thought that it could have been eaten by crows.

But he had saved one life.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (3 & 4)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (4): An evacuee slept on a floor for the first time in 80 days

April 29, 2013

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201304290003

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fourth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The Fukushima prefectural government finally set up an animal protection headquarters on April 15, 2011, more than a month after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The Miyagi and Iwate prefectural governments established similar organizations about 10 days after the disaster as they had concluded contracts with related organizations in advance. However, the Fukushima prefectural government had not done so. Therefore, it took time to coordinate the efforts of related organizations.

On the other hand, the government of Niigata Prefecture, which accepted about 10,000 evacuees, showed a much quicker response.

Using experience gained from two major earthquakes--the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake and the 2007 Niigata Chuetsu-oki Earthquake--the Niigata prefectural government set up its animal protection headquarters only a week after the March 11, 2011, disaster.

All 30 municipalities in the prefecture established systems to accept pets. Therefore, evacuees were able to live with their dogs or cats in evacuation centers.

In May 2011, the Fukushima prefectural government's food and sanitation division, which is also in charge of animal protection, began to receive inquiries such as, "Is it possible to enter evacuation centers in Fukushima Prefecture with our pets?"

Those inquiries were from people who had evacuated to Niigata Prefecture but later returned to Fukushima Prefecture.

The Fukushima prefectural government had not considered establishing evacuation centers exclusively for people who had evacuated with their pets.

Veterinarian Jun Kawamata, 53, of Fukushima city, was negotiating with a prefectural government-affiliated organization managing the Azuma Sports Park, the largest evacuation center in Fukushima city, where about 2,400 evacuees were living.

"People with pets are living in their cars as they are not allowed to enter evacuation centers with them. I'm worried that if it becomes hot, they could suffer heatstrokes. You should set up facilities to accommodate pets," Kawamata told officials of the organization.

However, they rejected the suggestion.

"Even people are cramped in evacuation centers. It is impossible to make space for animals. If we do so, we could receive complaints from evacuees," one official said.

However, Kawamata repeatedly visited the organization. Then, in mid-May, it finally allowed him to use part of the parking lot as a space for pets.

In early June, the facility, called "Pet Village," was completed there in a week. A company engaged in pet-related businesses supported its construction at Kawamata's request.

The facility had two buildings, one for dogs and the other for cats. It was equipped with a water supply and air-conditioning systems and 25 dogs and cats were housed in the facility.

Thanks to Pet Village, Sakae Sato, 68, who had evacuated from Minami-Soma city with his dog and cat, was able to sleep on a floor for the first time in 80 days. He felt the blood flow to the tips of his legs once again.

Until then, he had lived in his car or on stairways installed on the outer walls of buildings. He had entered evacuation centers only to receive aid supplies. From late March 2011, it became difficult for him to grip things with his left hand. As a result, he frequently dropped cups. He also had trouble walking. A doctor told him that he might be suffering from economy-class syndrome (venous thrombosis), which forms blood clots within a vein.

"As I was always with my pet dog and cat, I didn't feel loneliness. I was able to relax," Sato said, adding, "Unless I was with them, my appearance would have become older."

However, numbness in his hands remains.

Sato left the evacuation center in mid-August 2011. The Pet Village finished its mission in about three months.

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (3): Pets forgotten in the mass evacuation

April 26, 2013

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201304260004

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the third part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Veterinarian Seido Watanabe of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, was concerned about the pets of the people who had evacuated from their hometowns due to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

He visited evacuation centers in Koriyama, also in Fukushima Prefecture, where many evacuees were living, and saw many pet owners he was acquainted with. However, he did not see their animals.

"When I got on a bus prepared by the town office (for evacuation), I was told to leave my dog (at home)," one of the owners said.

Another said, "As I thought that I would be able to return home soon, I prepared only water (for my pet)." Every pet owner was weeping.

Some people brought their pets with them. But they were not allowed to bring them into evacuation centers. Therefore, they were living with the animals in their cars in parking lots while shivering in the cold weather.

Many pets were suffering from diarrhea. But Watanabe was impressed by the difficult living conditions their owners were enduring to keep them.

"It is a living hell for pet owners to have left their pets in their houses when they evacuated. But it is also a living hell to have brought their pets with them," he thought.

Unable to stand watching the owners suffer under miserable living conditions, he decided to keep their pets in a shed he had borrowed in Miharu town, also in Fukushima Prefecture. Though home delivery services were not available there in those days, fellow alumni of his university brought him the things necessary to care for the animals.

However, it was extremely difficult to take care of nearly 40 dogs and cats. On April 5, Watanabe visited the Fukushima Veterinary Medical Association, located in the city of Fukushima, and asked for their assistance. However, his request was refused.

"We are now extremely busy only in confirming the safety of our members," one of the association officials said.

On his return from the association, Watanabe visited veterinarian Jun Kawamata, 53, of Fukushima city, whom he had been acquainted with for 20 years, and vented his complaints.

Starting in late March 2011, Kawamata was also visiting the Azuma Sports Park, the largest evacuation center in Fukushima city, where about 2,400 evacuees were living. He worked as a volunteer, delivering pet food to owners living in their cars and vaccinating their animals.

A rumor had spread among pet owners that pets would be put down by public health centers if they were found. Therefore, some pet owners suspected that Kawamata's offer of a free vaccination was a ploy by the Fukushima prefectural government to euthanize their animals.

Watanabe did not see the prefectural government doing anything about pets. So, he asked prefectural government employees stationed in an evacuation center about their duties and priorities.

"We are putting a priority on human lives," one of the employees said. "Please don't talk about animals now."

Watanabe and Kawamata thought that their efforts to help evacuees' pets would become long-term ones. They encouraged each other and went their separate ways that day.

In March 2011, the Fukushima prefectural government's food and sanitation division, which is also in charge of animal protection, was in extreme chaos. The section's tasks ranged widely from food and water to graveyard and burial-related services.

Immediately after the disaster, employees of the section were tasked with a variety of responsibilities, ranging from restoring water service and securing of crematoriums, to checking of radioactive levels of food.

Two employees, who were in charge of animal protection, were busy preparing manuals on preventing the spread of infectious diseases among people living in evacuation centers. Responsibilities for pets were put on the back-burner.

Gov't doesn't want responsibility of evacuating schools

Japan court rejects demand to evacuate Fukushima children

April 25, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304250125>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Japanese court has rejected a demand that a city affected by the fallout of the country's 2011 nuclear disaster evacuate its children.

The unusual lawsuit was filed on behalf of the children by their parents and anti-nuclear activists in June 2011. The Sendai High Court handed down its ruling on April 24.

The case had drawn international attention because it touched the uncertainties about the effects of continuous low-dose radiation on health, especially that of children, who are far more vulnerable than adults.

The lawsuit argued the city of Koriyama had legal responsibility to evacuate children at elementary schools and junior-high schools, which are part of compulsory education under Japanese law.

The court acknowledged radiation in the city exceeded levels deemed safe prior to the disaster. But it said the government shoulders no responsibility for evacuating the schools as demanded--in effect, telling people to leave on their own if they were worried.

Toshio Yanagihara, one of the lawyers, said the ruling was unfair as the children were "victims with absolutely no responsibility for the nuclear accident."

A lower court threw out the original case in December 2011, but that ruling was appealed. The latest ruling can also be appealed.

Koriyama is a city of 330,000 people located about 60 kilometers (40 miles) west of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which went into multiple meltdowns more than two years ago after a giant tsunami destroyed its cooling system. That set off the worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl.

Thousands of children got cancer after the Chernobyl disaster, but the cases did not surface for several years.

It is unclear whether Fukushima children are equally prone, as cancer has various causes, and radiation affects people differently. Radioactive contamination is complex, tainting not only the air but also getting in the food, soil and water.

Some experts say radiation outside the restricted zone right around the Fukushima plant is so low the probability of getting cancer is no different from the rest of Japan. But many Fukushima residents are worried and have moved out.

The government's handling of the Fukushima disaster has led to widespread public distrust. Thousands of people have taken to the streets, demanding a phase-out of atomic power. The government has expressed a desire to restart reactors after checking on their safety.

Asahi - Shadow Units lasy episode (21)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (21): Fukushima plant chief cried

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304190009>

April 19, 2013

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the final part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

To improve communications in the effort to defuse the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the first-ever meeting between the leader of the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force (CRF) and the plant's chief was held on April 21, 2011.

"We're really, really sorry," said Masao Yoshida, head of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, bowing deeply upon seeing Maj. Gen. Masato Taura, CRF deputy commander.

The meeting was held in an isolated building within the Fukushima plant housing crucial facilities and equipment, such as communications and power supply systems.

Taura was commanding the CRF's operations to help deal with the nuclear crisis from J-Village, a soccer-training complex not far from the crippled nuclear plant, which had been turned into the staging ground for efforts to bring the reactors under control.

After more than a month of leading the desperate efforts to contain the nuclear crisis while remaining in the building, Yoshida looked haggard.

Taura had intended to discuss with Yoshida measures to ensure quick and effective communications between TEPCO and the CRF in emergencies.

Taura decided to meet with Yoshida after he was unable to communicate with the utility when a powerful earthquake measuring lower 6 struck Fukushima Prefecture on April 11, exactly one month after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck. He was alarmed by his frustration in trying in vain to obtain accurate and detailed information about the situation at the plant.

As the major general was unsure why the head of the plant was apologetic upon their meeting, Yoshida said, "It's about the explosion at the No. 3 reactor."

"Although the temperature (in the reactor building) was rising, I didn't think the situation was so dangerous and asked the SDF to spray water (on the reactor)," Yoshida explained. "I'm sorry for what happened."

On the morning of March 14, some members of GSDF's Central Nuclear Biological Chemical Weapon Defense Unit were injured by a hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor. Yoshida thought Taura had come to complain about the incident.

After making it clear that he was not there to talk about the explosion, Taura proposed direct communications between them in emergencies.

"We are also preparing to rescue workers at the plant (in the event of an emergency)," he added.

Since the rescue mission was being planned and prepared for in profound secrecy, Taura couldn't discuss it in any detail. He did the best he could to give some ideas about the highly secret mission to Yoshida, who was fighting a truly difficult battle to defuse the nuclear crisis as the head of the plant.

Yoshida was moved to tears as he learned how far the SDF was prepared to go to save TEPCO employees.

The meeting between Taura and Yoshida, which lasted only 10 minutes or so, established a reliable system of emergency communications between the two organizations.

Around that time, the Defense Ministry received a secret request from the prime minister's office.

The government had developed a plan to lay pipes connecting the crippled reactors directly with a location on a hill some 1.5 kilometers away. They would be used by the SDF to inject cement into the reactors if it became impossible to cool them, according to the plan.

Eventually, it was decided that TEPCO would carry out the necessary work, but the SDF made preparations to deal with all imaginable worst-case scenarios.

When some three months had passed since the nuclear disaster broke out, the CRF units deployed around the Fukushima plant for various missions were finally relieved of their duties and returned to their respective bases.

They included the Central Nuclear Biological Chemical Weapon Defense Unit, which decontaminated polluted areas and sprayed water on the reactors from the ground, a helicopter brigade that dropped water on the reactors from the air, deputy commanders sent to the front line of dealing with the crisis and an airborne brigade prepared for evacuating residents.

On June 10, the Central Readiness Brigade, which had made preparations for the secret mission to rescue TEPCO employees at the nuclear plant, returned to Camp Utsunomiya, its base in Tochigi Prefecture.

The first thing senior officers of the brigade did on returning to the camp was to shred materials concerning the secret mission.

Mothers' feeling of helplessness - No help from experts nor Gov't

April 30, 2013

POINT OF VIEW/ Katsuno Onozawa: Government's lethargic response stresses Fukushima mothers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/opinion/AJ201304300010>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

As concern over nuclear accidents and radiation lessens, people have begun to go so far as to talk about restarting idle reactors.

Now, in the third year since the onset of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, an event we were told would change our values and the way we live, there are still evacuees who cannot return home.

Is concern over nuclear accidents already fading away? Or are people consciously trying to forget?

The Asahi Shimbun asked Katsuno Onozawa, a doctor of psychosomatic medicine, who has taken part in children's health consultations in Fukushima Prefecture.

* * *

I regularly join children's health consultations organized in Fukushima, Koriyama and other cities by a group of physicians gathered from across the country at the behest of a Fukushima NPO (nonprofit organization).

What shocked me the first time I participated in January of last year was the gap between what the newspapers and TV news were reporting and the reality in Fukushima as attested to by the mothers who came for consultations.

Wanting to protect their children from radiation, they pleaded with the prefectural and city governments and local doctors, but none would take their side.

They just said things like, "It's safe. You don't have to take any special action. There are lots of radiation-phobia mothers, and we can't deal with them all."

They worry that they have to continue living amid high radiation levels due to their inability to evacuate the prefecture for financial or other reasons.

But even other mothers said things to them such as, "The prefecture and city say it's safe, so it's OK," and, "It's strange of you to express alarm, even though you're staying." Even spouses differed, with husbands telling their wives they worry too much.

These women are isolated in their communities and families as they conceal their discomfort. Many reproach themselves, thinking, "Maybe I'm the one who's strange," and become depressed.

It seemed they were meeting disapproval simply for coming to the consultations. I was at a loss for words because of these mothers' situation, and I could not sleep at night because I was so enraged at the government's heartless response.

Since soon after the nuclear accident, the national government and industry experts have repeatedly said that radiation levels are not high enough to immediately affect one's health.

Thinking they could not know what effects it would have in the future because of the example of the Chernobyl disaster, mothers desperately gathered information and pleaded for the authorities to prepare. But all the experts did was say, "It's safe so you don't need (radiation) checks, and we do not recommend evacuating the prefecture."

Yet the children were exhibiting a range of symptoms including sore throats, nosebleeds, diarrhea, fatigue, headaches and rashes. The most dangerous thing is to write off causes of illness as psychosocial factors with statements like, "Your child's stress comes from not being able to go outdoors" and that a "mother worrying will make her child sick."

When I talk with mothers coming for consultations lately, it seems more of them are exhausted and trying to maintain their psychological balance by forcing themselves to think, "There's nothing I can do," "This, too, is fate" and "It's easier on my mind to forget about the radiation and just live my life." Perhaps because their feeling of powerlessness is unchanged despite all their pleas.

The same thing is happening in Tokyo, too. At the request of parents and guardians, the school my child attends is still being careful about where school lunch ingredients are made, and they invite radiation experts to give talks to the children on ways to protect the body from radiation. But schools like this have become the minority.

If we say "it's safe" despite the risks only to erase fears, then we simply leave in place the danger that defenseless children may be contaminated.

I hope people will take what the government and media say with a grain of salt and will not stop thinking and acting for themselves.

Katsuno Onozawa, born in 1965, earned a degree in women's health from Melbourne University Graduate School in 1996. She conducted research for the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London and now works at a Tokyo clinic.

(This article is based on an interview by Eiji Yamaguchi.)

Asahi - The disaster and animals (5)

May 1, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (5): Dogs wandering in the no-entry zones

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305010005

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fifth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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The Fukushima prefectural government estimates that before the Great East Japan Earthquake, there were about 10,000 dogs in areas within a radius of 20 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Of these, only about 300 dogs were able to evacuate along with their owners. Estimating that 26 percent of the 10,000 dogs died due to the earthquake and tsunami, about 7,000 dogs are believed to have been left behind in the areas. A similar number of cats are also believed to have remained there.

While reporters of major media companies withdrew from areas within a radius of 30 kilometers of the crippled nuclear plant, independent news service Asia Press Front (APF), based in Tokyo, reported on wandering pets there. That spurred animal protection organizations and volunteers to embark on a campaign to save the dogs and cats.

In early April 2011, it was reported that areas within a radius of 20 kilometers would become no-entry zones. Then, complaints flooded the Fukushima prefectural government's food and sanitation division, which is also in charge of animal protection.

One person who called the division asked, "Why doesn't the prefectural government save animals?"

Another said, "It will become impossible for volunteers to enter the areas. What are you doing?"

In those days, the prefectural government was not engaged in saving dogs and cats in areas within a radius of 20 kilometers.

"Though we also want to go to the areas, our safety is not guaranteed there. So we will not be able to do the job (of protecting dogs and cats)," Takeshi Ono, 45, a veterinarian and a Fukushima prefectural government official in charge of animal protection, repeatedly replied on the phone.

One of the callers told Ono, "The lives of dogs and cats are more important than your life."

Telephones in the division continued to ring until 11 p.m. or later.

In response to the complaints, the prefectural government decided to send its officials to the no-entry zones from April 28 to May 2, 2011, in the name of "research and protection."

"We finally made the decision," Ono wrote in his diary.

When Ono entered the no-entry zones for the first time, he felt that the areas were "dead towns." Washed clothes that had been put out to dry remained hung. Half-eaten meals were left behind as they were prepared. And some of the dogs had died while tied to their doghouses or other facilities. Other dogs were wandering around with their ribs clearly visible. Ono became unable to see the scenes in front of him due to the tears in his eyes.

The prefectural government officials were allowed to stay in the no-entry zones for only two hours a day. They put a total of 27 dogs and two cats in their protective custody, and placed them in a rental

warehouse in the Iinomachi district of Fukushima city. Immediately before that, the prefectural government had concluded a rental contract to use it as a shelter for the animals.

In the warehouse, dog trainer Kenji Shishido, 39, was taking care of the dogs and cats by himself. Shishido, who had been working as a volunteer for public health centers, was employed as a caretaker as he was young and strong.

The shelter was facing a shortage of goods and manpower. Though many of the dogs there were medium-size or larger-size animals, the cages were for small-size ones. The dogs in the shelter were continuing to bark, as if complaining about the lack of space.

Food and fresh water were given to the animals only once a day. Shishido was busy changing newspapers on the floor, which were covered with feces and urine, with new ones. He had no time to take the dogs out for walks.

Air conditioners were broken, and water was leaking from the roof.

After the consecutive holidays that lasted from late April to early May, volunteers stopped coming to the warehouse.

Seeing the dogs and cats whose number had increased to 60, Shishido had a growing concern over the shelter's future.

Song of hope

May 1, 2013

Song by pianist Tsujii, Exile member Atsushi released online to 'spread hope' after disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20130501p2a00m0na001000c.html>

The chorus version of a song created by Japanese pianist Nobuyuki Tsujii and Exile vocalist Atsushi to support Japan's recovery from the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake disaster has been released on the Internet for free from May 1, along with the music score.

A CD featuring the pair also went on sale on May 1 but they decided to distribute the single, titled, "Sore Demo, Ikiteyuku" (Even then, we'll keep living), on a special web page without charge for a limited time to encourage people to sing the song and spread a message of hope. They say they hope the song will soothe people still facing difficulties after the quake, which triggered a devastating tsunami, followed by meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Tsujii composed the music soon after the disaster, instilling in it a prayer for recovery, and he performed it in disaster-hit areas. Atsushi responded with the lyrics and song, and their collaboration was unveiled in an NHK program in March.

The lyrics speak of hope for the future, with a decision to "keep living" even when life has been tough. The chorus version was sung by the "NHK Tokyo Children Chorus" group. The sheet music and audio are available for a limited period online at: <http://exile.jp/ikiteyuku/>

Asahi - The disaster and animals (6)

May 3, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (6): Dogs in the shelter are suffering from mental illness

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305030007

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the sixth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

Residents were allowed to start returning to their homes for brief visits in the no-entry zones around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on May 10, 2011, two months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear accident.

Takeshi Ono, 45, a veterinarian and a Fukushima prefectural government official in charge of animal protection, thought that pets that had been left behind by evacuees should be removed by their owners. Even if he and other prefectural government officials had found dogs in the no-entry zones, the animals would not approach them. Cats had also not even come close to them. Ono thought that if their owners went there, however, they would be able to easily catch them and remove them.

But his idea was rejected by officials of the central government's local headquarters to deal with the nuclear disaster. They said that each resident would be allowed to bring only one plastic bag of goods and would be prohibited from taking their pets with them.

After gathering opinions, it was decided that owners should tie their pets in front of their houses, then, prefectural government officials would collect the animals later and decontaminate them if necessary. The prefectural government would also place them in protective custody in its shelter and owners could pick them up later.

As soon as the residents began to temporarily return to their homes, many dogs and cats were caught by their owners as had been expected. They were brought to the shelter in the Iinomachi district of Fukushima city by Ono and other prefectural government officials.

Kenji Shishido, who was taking care of the dogs and cats in the shelter, became panicked as the numbers of dogs and cats there sharply increased. The figure reached 146 dogs and 47 cats in early June, three times more than before residents were allowed to return home for brief visits.

Though the number of caretakers increased to two, including Shishido, the shelter was still extremely understaffed. Because of that, the two would put the same amount of food in the cages of the dogs, irregardless of whether they were small or large dogs.

Proper hygiene was inadequate, too. Due to being weakened physically from their long-term ordeal of trying to stay alive, cats as a group caught colds. Dogs in bunches were also infected with deadly parvoviruses. As a result, five dogs died in May alone.

On the other hand, puppies were born one after another, but it was impossible to take care of them. There were several instances in which they “disappeared” one by one. When the caretakers looked around, they found only their legs, as mother dogs would apparently even eat their own puppies.

Shishido heard the barking of dogs even in his dreams. Thinking that the situation of the shelter has reached its limit, he asked the prefectural government to do something about it. However, prefectural government officials did not listen to his opinions, apparently because they were busy with their own jobs. Jun Kawamata, a veterinarian of Fukushima city, also heard a rumor about the serious situation at the shelter. At that time, he was a member of the Fukushima prefectural government’s headquarters for animal protection.

Through the Fukushima Veterinary Medical Association, Kawamata asked the prefectural government to allow him to inspect the shelter. However, officials of the prefectural government refused to even reveal its location.

In early June, Kawamata drove around in an area where he believed the shelter was located and finally found it.

When he entered the facility, he was shocked into silence. It was dark inside and full of a strange odor. Dogs were barking pitifully. The barks sounded like those of wild animals.

“These dogs are suffering from mental illness,” Kawamata thought. Unable to leave the situation as is, he hurriedly drove to the prefectural government.

Asahi- The disaster and animals (7)

May 6, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (7): Dogs in shelter finally get some attention

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305060001

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the seventh part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Alarmed by the wretched conditions at the pet shelter operated by Fukushima Prefecture, Jun Kawamata, a veterinarian, confronted Masatoshi Oshima, chief of the prefectural government's food and sanitation hygiene division.

"What do you intend to do about such terrible conditions?" Kawamata asked Oshima with indignation.

At that time, Oshima, 61, was serving as head of the prefecture's animal relief and protection task force. Oshima told Kawamata that the prefecture planned to build another animal shelter to protect pets that had become homeless because of the nuclear crisis triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011. The prefectural government official said the new shelter would be composed of rows of cages placed on a tract of land owned by the prefecture. Weeds would be removed from the land to create space for the new shelter, according to the plan.

Kawamata bristled at the proposal, which would keep the animals outdoors.

"It's totally unacceptable to leave them out in the open just when summer comes," he said.

"If you say so. Find us a good place (to keep animals)," responded Oshima.

Kawamata sought the help of Seido Watanabe, a veterinarian friend of his. At that time, Watanabe was taking care of some 40 cats and dogs on behalf of the evacuees who owned them in a barn in Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture.

Watanabe himself was also looking for a new place to restart his practice.

Four days later, Kawamata received good news from Watanabe, who said he had secured a bankrupt pachinko parlor in Miharu for use as a new animal shelter.

A week later, major pet shop chain Kojima, at the request of Kawamata, sent a team of 70 vets and shop staffers to improve the conditions at the shelter. They started with the hygienic care and cleaning of the dogs.

They first washed the kennels and shampooed, groomed and trimmed the dogs. With their coats of hair clean and fluffy again, the dogs enjoyed walking around for the first time in a long while. They also replaced broken air conditioners and fixed the water heater.

The Kojima team also installed partitions between kennels to prevent dogs from fighting and hurting each other. Fights between dogs in neighboring kennels had broken out from time to time. In some cases, a dog bit off the tail of the dog next door.

The helpers sorted out a long list of problems related to the management of the shelter and created special space for dogs suffering from diseases. Thanks to their devoted efforts, the conditions at the shelter improved dramatically in just two days.

As he watched them work quietly but diligently for the well-being of the animals, Kenji Shishido, a member of the shelter staff since it was first set up, found it impossible to hold back tears.

Shishido felt some complex feelings, with a sense of relief that both the dogs and the shelter staff had been saved, mixed with a bitter sense of regret that he had failed to do enough to help the animals.

If the shelter had sought help from volunteers, the situation would have improved much sooner. But the prefectural government didn't allow volunteers to work at the shelter and had gone so far as to keep its location a secret. Why did the prefecture keep the shelter so tightly closed off to help and support from outsiders?

Oshima explained that since the shelter was not staffed at night, there were concerns about possible foul play. He also said local residents could have launched a campaign against the shelter out of concerns about radiation if it had become known to the local communities that there were cats and dogs there that had been found homeless in off-limit areas around the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

But Shishido suspects that the prefectural government kept the shelter closed to outside scrutiny because it didn't want the dismal conditions there to become known to the public.

Indeed, the local government was very nervous about possible leaks of information about the shelter, and banned Shishido and other staff members from taking pictures of the facility.

Since Kojima's team began to work at the shelter, an increasing number of volunteers joined the staff to take care of the animals.

* * *

You can't live there but you can display streamers

May 5, 2013

Carp streamers displayed in Fukushima town

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130505_13.html

As Japan observes Children's Day on Sunday, around 100 carp-shaped streamers are flying in the sky of a town near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. People are not allowed to live there, but they can visit some parts of the town during the daytime.

A local group of young people carried out the Children's Day celebration to pray for the healthy growth of children affected by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident in March 2011.

Carp-shaped streamers symbolize a healthy childhood. The streamers were sent to the organizers by people across the country, in response to their online request. Some of the streamers carried messages encouraging children in Fukushima.

At the celebration site, the carp streamers on a rope were hoisted to 40 meters by using two cranes.

The carp streamers are flying high in the blue sky, but few people visited the town to see them on the day.

The head of the organizing group, Mitsuhiro Hirosaka, said he wants to bring hope to children still living outside the town.

On his own at a Fukushima school!

May 7, 2013

Last remaining pupil at Fukushima school hides his loneliness

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305070074

By NORIYOSHI OTSUKI/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Takashi Sato arrives at Onami Elementary School around 7:30 a.m., changes his navy uniform for a sky blue sweat suit, and starts his daily routine surrounded by empty classrooms and vacant hallways.

His constant smile and cheerful demeanor betray any sense of loneliness he may feel.

The 11-year-old is the only pupil at the school.

Forty-one children used to play in the yard at Onami Elementary School. But on March 11, 2011, a magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan, leading to meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, 57 kilometers southeast of the school.

As fears of radiation spread, the number of elementary school pupils in Fukushima Prefecture fell below 100,000, down nearly 19,000 from before the nuclear accident.

Onami Elementary School and another elementary school in the prefecture now have only one pupil.

Takashi's school day usually starts outside, where he is greeted by his teacher, Kei Omuro, 41, and the vice principal, Kazuaki Sato, 50. The boy gleefully replies, "Good morning."

Before his first class starts, Takashi does some exercise, such as running and skipping, on the soft new soil brought in after accumulated radioactive substances were removed.

The mountainous area where the school is located had relatively high radiation levels in Fukushima city. A schoolyard dosimeter now shows 0.3 microsievert per hour, slightly lower than in central parts of the city.

A photo of 10 smiling children, who attended the school until the 2012 academic year ended in March, hangs on the back of Takashi's classroom.

Seven sixth-graders went on to junior high school. Two younger pupils transferred to a nearby elementary school because of the dwindling population at Onami Elementary School.

Takashi, now a sixth-grader, is the only one in the photo who remained.

When asked if he feels lonely without a classmate, he says, "I probably got used to it in about a week."

Takashi said he makes it a rule not to say he is lonely.

"I keep it in here," he says, holding his chest with both hands.

Takashi's first class on April 23 is arithmetic. He and Omuro bow to each other when the class begins at 8:30 a.m.

The 60-square-meter classroom has only two desks--one for the pupil and one for the teacher--where they solve problems together. Takashi is good at arithmetic.

When Takashi appears drowsy, Omuro tells him to go to the restroom to wash his face.

"I could fall into a rut because we are alone," Omuro says after Takashi leaves. "I make it a point not to."

The fourth class is English, where Takashi learns how to introduce himself to a stranger.

"Hello, my name is Sato Takashi," he says in a tense, cracking voice. "Uh. ... What's your name?"

The lesson brings out Omura's sympathy for his young student.

"Usually, pupils practice conversations with their classmates on the same level, but Takashi has to partner with an adult," the teacher says. "I feel sorry for him."

Takashi's lunch companions are also adults--Omuro, Sato and two school employees. He plays catch with Sato at lunch break.

The boy's routine at school can take a strange turn.

At 1:30 p.m., he goes to a broadcasting booth, and speaks into a microphone to tell his nonexistent schoolmates: "Let's start cleaning."

He plays music and returns to his classroom to wash the floor.

He returns to the booth after 15 minutes to announce the end of the cleaning task. "Thanks for a job well done," he tells the school.

Omuro never asks Takashi if he feels lonely.

He says he cannot forget when Takashi learned he would be the only pupil from the new academic year during the last school lunch in March.

"Takashi was visibly upset," Omuro says, with tears in his eyes.

Masaaki Abe, 54, principal of the Onami Elementary School, says he wants Takashi to get in touch with as many people as possible at the elementary school to nurture his social development.

He meets Takashi at the school entrance at 7:30 a.m. Around the same time, Yoshinobu Sakuma, 60, a school janitor, cleans around the entrance to greet the school's only pupil.

Local residents have played a big part in Takashi's school life.

The Onami district solicited contributions in March and donated 300,000 yen (\$3,000) to the elementary school to spend on Takashi's education.

Yoshitsugu Yamaki, 54, who heads the local athletic association, says he plans to liven up the May annual sports festival organized by residents and Onami Elementary School.

"We will ask for help from the women's division of the agricultural cooperative association and serve rice balls and miso soup with pork and vegetables," Yamaki says.

This year, Takashi may take part as a member of a school team that includes teachers and school employees.

Despite the enthusiasm for local events, residents who evacuated from the Onami district are not expected to return anytime soon.

"We have to keep up our efforts to encourage them to gradually return to their hometown, starting with attending events such as the sports festival and the summer festival," Yamaki says.

As a sixth-grader, Takashi will move on to a junior high school next year.

Yamaki says he hopes the elementary school will not be closed after Takashi graduates.

Time for TEPCO to release radioactive water into the ocean

May 8, 2013

Ibaraki fishermen go after whitebait for first time since nuclear disaster

JJI

KITAIBARAKI, IBARAKI PREF. – Whitebait fishing resumed in the northern part of Ibaraki Prefecture on Tuesday for the first time since it was voluntarily halted due to the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Two fishermen's cooperatives in Kitaibaraki and one in Hitachi resumed catching whitebait, their main product, some two years and two months after the accident at the stricken Tokyo Electric Power Co. nuclear plant north of Ibaraki.

The cooperatives refrained from whitebait fishing as shipments were suspended for other fish due to radioactive contamination.

A total of 27 small fishing boats left Otsu port in Kitaibaraki early Tuesday. Some 5.5 tons of whitebait were landed and distributed to processing companies by the three cooperatives.

After radiation checks, the dried whitebait will be put on the market.

Yoshinori Sakamoto, a senior official of the Otsu fishermen's cooperative, said they won't be back on track until regular whitebait sales restart.

Young sardine catch resumes off northern Ibaraki Pref. after more than 2-year hiatus



Young sardines are brought ashore at Otsu Port in Kitaibaraki, Ibaraki Prefecture, on May 7, for the first time in almost two years and two months. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130507p2a00m0na004000c.html>

KITAIBARAKI, Ibaraki -- Young sardine fishing resumed at ports in northern Ibaraki Prefecture on May 7, more than two years after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns in neighboring Fukushima Prefecture.

The fisheries cooperatives in Otsu, Hirakata and Kawajiri restarted the young sardine catch after "test fishing found no safety problems" in terms of radiation contamination of the fish -- a local delicacy called "shirasu" in Japanese.

The resumption brought smiles to the faces of many local fishermen, while some expressed concerns about the possibility of harmful rumors pushing market prices down.

At the Otsu fishing port in the city of Kitaibaraki, 27 small fishing boats belonging to the Otsu fisheries cooperative set sail at around 5 a.m. on May 7. They returned about three hours later, and case after case of young sardines -- each fish measuring around 2.5 centimeters in length -- was hauled ashore.

"It is best to be out on the sea," said 59-year-old fisherman Heishiro Suzuki with a smile on his face. "I've got misgivings about whether consumers will buy our fish, but we must move forward, one step at a time."

The three fisheries cooperatives had voluntarily suspended catches of young sardines after radioactive materials were detected in young lance fish caught off Ibaraki Prefecture in the wake of the reactor meltdowns. The fisheries cooperatives had conducted test catches once a week from August to December last year before confirming the safety of the fish.

Whitebait fishing resumed after nuclear disaster

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130507_27.html

Fisheries cooperatives in Ibaraki Prefecture have resumed full-scale fishing of whitebait for the first time since the Fukushima nuclear accident in March 2011.

Boats belonging to the 3 cooperatives in northern Ibaraki, south of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, set sail early Tuesday. They returned to port with a combined catch of about 5 tons.

Whitebait fishing was suspended after high levels of radioactivity were detected in sand lance caught soon after the nuclear accident.

It was allowed to resume this season because tests conducted on trial catches from August to December last year were free of radioactivity.

The whitebait caught on Tuesday will undergo radiation contamination tests before and after boiling or drying in the sun.

If confirmed safe, it will be shipped to the major wholesale market, Tsukiji in Tokyo, early next week.

What is happening to the horses?

<http://www.save-children-from-radiation.org/2013/05/05/something-serious-is-going-on-horse-ranch-owner-worries-alarming-conditions-of-horses-in-iitate-fukushima/#permalink>

Photo by Osamu Nakamura,
Written by Michitaka Kobayashi
Photos by Osamu Nakamura
March 20,2013

As I climbed the steep stairs to the Yamatsumi shinto shrine from the entrance gateway at the bottom of the mountain, the view over the beautiful Iitate village surrounded by the rich nature appeared in front of me. There was once a rumor, based on a TV program, that Yamatsumi shrine blocked the wave of radiation, shielding the village. I asked about the rumor, but the person living in the shrine laughed my question down saying, "Oh, I have heard about it!" Maybe the TV clues wanted to create an emotional episode that a shinto shrine protected the village from radiation.



As soon as we met, Hosokawa started saying, "This country is going mad. There is something seriously wrong going on". He led us to the ranch after quick exchange of greetings. According to him, horses have

fallen ill one by one within these short weeks. Among his 34 horses, four were unable to stand up anymore.

One of the four, a white miniature horse, had the worst condition. Its skin was badly damaged. The veterinarian doctor who accompanied us saw it and indicated the symptoms of damaged liver although he did not know the reason. It had jaundiced eyes. The doctor was wondering why its knees were so wobbly. Hosokawa stroked the lying horse, saying, "I think it can't make it through this month. Poor thing...."

A wild boar rushed down beside the ranch, as we were talking.

15 foals have been born since the beginning of this year, but 14 of them died within a month, sometimes within a week.

"I have lived with horses since I was a kid, but I have never seen anything like this. It's not normal. I think radiation is responsible for this".

Hosokawa stresses the effect of radiation as a cause. Of course he doesn't have proper scientific grounds to support his idea, but his long relationship with horses gives him the instinctive feeling.

The media have reported that many cows had died in the evacuation area, because people who fed them left the village, and the cows didn't get sufficient nutrition to survive. However, the horses on Hosokawa's ranch have been getting sufficient feed, if not plenty. The horses without symptoms did not look skinny and seemed to have appetite.

Later we asked a public health control centre to check the blood of the miniature horse. The results were negative for transmitted diseases or nutrient deficiency. But they did not conclude that it was not leukemia, which can be connected with radiation. The centre said they needed further investigation to determine the cause of the horse's debility.

Recently at a conference at Tokyo University four scientists reported that some abnormalities in plants and animals have been witnessed around the areas of Fukushima nuclear power plants, including Iitate. However, under the current regulation for radiation, the effects of radiation may not even be associated with the thyroid cancer on children. It would be highly doubtful to acknowledge the association between the radiation effect and the abnormal conditions of the horses. However, although there is a difficulty to admit the relationship between radiation and health risks, the fact that Iitate is included in the evacuation zone means that there is a certain risk in health to stay in the area.

Maybe the alarming conditions of animals may bring up new insight. What is happening to the horses?

Hosokawa had been actively involved in local community activities. He had participated with his horses at many events organized by shrines all around Japan and in traditional samurai TV series. His horses have

appeared on TV with popular samurai heroes on their backs. Hosokawa's horses had also served for local elementary schools and schools for the blind, for therapy purposes.

After the earthquake, Hosokawa evacuated with his wife and daughter, but he soon returned to his village to look after the cows and horses, which he treats like members of his family. He even rescued animals living at other farms with his truck, as a favour, asked by fellow domestic livestock dealers. Since then, he has been fighting alone, literally, only by himself.

He has pleaded with TEPCO and the Iitate local authorities to evacuate horses to other areas, but he has been turned down for the reason that there is no place to accept the animals. So he stayed in the village and kept looking after horses. He somehow managed to send 87 horses away safely using his personal connections. He claimed TEPCO for compensation for the 87 horses, but the power company rejected his claim for the lack of evidence of Hosokawa breeding his horses.

"To be honest with you, I have almost reached the limit to give up. But I can't leave the horses behind. They have helped our family in generations. How can I abandon them? I'm ready to die with my horses here".

Hosokawa has been ignoring suggestions to do health check-ups on himself, and getting internal radiation measuring with the Whole Body Counter. For Hosokawa, what he can do now is to save the horses in return for their serving Hosokawa family.

At his ranch, the dead bodies of horses which died a month ago, now only with bones and skin exposed after being eaten by birds and foxes, were left on the ground unattached.

"It is illegal to keep the dead bodies like this, but I keep them as evidence of the horses' death to present to TEPCO. I wish I could bury them".

The white miniature horse with the serious health conditions died at the end of March, a week after our visit. As soon as it died, crows came and plucked out the eye balls from its head, Hosokawa later told me.

We were overwhelmed by Hosokawa's ghastly expression on his face and stunned with a shock by the grave situation, which was beyond our imagination.

"This country is going mad, I'm sure something grave is going to happen". He murmured many times, as if he was talking to himself.

On April 1, we heard that Yamatzumi shrine had burned down, and that the body of a woman was found on the site.

Request form Hosokawa

Hosokawa hasn't openly talked about his horses and their unusual conditions because he feared that it would trouble others with whom he has personally relations. However, having seen increasing cases of abnormalities in the horses, he finally decided to make the matter public.

He wants to make his situation, name, and address public so that anyone who is interested in this matter can contact him. Hosokawa hopes that research bodies concerned with animals and livestock, and radiation, would conduct further research on the horses.

Tokuei Hosokawa

Usuisiaza cho 123-1, Iitate, Soma-gun, Fukushima prefecture

The article was originally published in March 20, 2012、 by Michitaka Kobayashi (text) and Osamu Nakamura (pictures) at "Shinsai no Ato"

Translated by WNSCR team

GPS to follow-up evacuees" movements

May 10, 2013

Cellphone logs help estimate radiation exposure of Fukushima evacuees

see maps under the following link

May 10, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/analysis/AJ201305100073>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

Chaos reigned during the early phase of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and people who fled the area have no idea how much radiation they were exposed to before the evacuation. But a scientist has come up with a novel approach to better evaluate their radiation doses by utilizing the logs of GPS-equipped cellphones.

Ryugo Hayano, a physics professor at the University of Tokyo, said he got the idea when he learned that Zenrin DataCom Co., a geographical information service firm, had acquired anonymous-format location logs of Global Positioning System-enabled cellphones with the consent of their users.

He and a co-worker estimated the flow of evacuees on an hour-by-hour basis by using logs of users who were in Fukushima Prefecture when the nuclear crisis began to unfurl. Those users account for roughly 0.7 percent of the entire population of Fukushima Prefecture.

The data shows how people ebbed away from the areas surrounding the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after the crisis was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. The number of people continued to decrease as the central government expanded the target area of its evacuation orders from the initial 3-kilometer radius to 10 km and, finally, to 20 km.

While an estimated 76,000 people stayed within a 20-km radius of the nuclear plant before the disaster, that number plummeted to about 2,000 on the fifth day of the crisis. These observations are largely consistent with findings of a study by the National Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission.

The reconstructed flow of people shows that, as of March 15, 2011, only a limited number of people stayed in areas where the central government's simulator, the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI), gave thyroid gland dose estimates of 100 millisieverts or more for a 12-day period from 6 a.m., March 12, through midnight, March 23, 2011. The SPEEDI doses tend to be overestimates, as they hypothesize a 1-year-old infant who stayed outdoors around the clock.

The government of Fukushima Prefecture has asked its residents to submit records of their whereabouts during the early phase of the disaster to allow their doses of external radiation exposure to be evaluated. The poor response ratio of less than 30 percent has been attributed to fading memories and other factors.

The latest analysis could be used to evaluate their doses more accurately, the researchers said. The research results were published online on May 10 in Proceedings of the Japan Academy, an English-language journal.

Researcher uses GPS data to investigate evacuee movements after nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130510p2a00m0na007000c.html>

A University of Tokyo professor has learned the movements of evacuees after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster using cell phone GPS data, he announced on May 9.

GPS data provides objective information on people's movements, unlike testimony from evacuees, which he had relied on until now, said professor Ryugo Hayano.

Zenrin DataCom Co. Ltd., which provides GPS-related services, cooperated in the project. Hayano put together data for around 14,000 people, equivalent to about 0.7 percent of Fukushima Prefecture's population, for the period from March 10 to March 17, 2011.

From the data, he estimated the population in the 20-kilometer zone around the plant before the disaster began at around 76,000. From hourly GPS data, he was able to see how whenever an evacuation order was released from the government, people would move out from the zone.

He put the number of people in the zone from late March 14 to 15, when aerial radiation values from radioactive iodine are thought to have been at their highest, at 2,000 people at the most. However, as the data had been set up so that individuals' identities were hidden, he does not know if the people include young children, who are most susceptible to the effects of radioactive iodine.

Radioactive iodine has a short half-life, making estimates of people's exposure to it early in the disaster difficult. Hayano said, "By combining the data with predictions of the spread of radioactive iodine, I hope to understand people's radioactive exposure early on in the disaster."

Asahi- The disaster and animals (9)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (9): Protection of cats in no-go zone took a back seat

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305100009

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the ninth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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From May through August 2011, Takeshi Ono, chief veterinary technician at the Fukushima prefectural government, made almost daily trips to the evacuation zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

During these four months, residents in the no-go zone were allowed to briefly return home for the first time since their evacuation.

Ono would get up at 5 a.m. and go to the area in a four-ton truck. He would spend three to four hours in the off-limits zone, taking cats and dogs into custody, and then transport them to the animal shelter operated by the prefectural government in the city of Fukushima.

Ono would return to the prefectural office at around 8 p.m. after taking care of animals at the shelter. He would then do some paperwork before calling it a night. He would usually arrive home only after midnight.

The operation to rescue and protect pets left in the no-go zone was carried out by four to five two-person teams. Initially, they could secure up to some 20 animals in one day of work. But the number declined gradually. In August, the animal rescue squad couldn't pick up any dog or cat on some days.

As the days rolled by, the pet rescue workers found dead animals more and more frequently.

Ono's heart ached when he saw a dog lying dead by its own kennel. The dog was unleashed and could have gone anywhere it had wanted. Ono thought the dog must have died while waiting for its owner to return.

He wished he could have started the mission earlier. He was also saddened by the thought that many of the animals' lives could have been saved if a system to evacuate residents together with their pets had been established.

As the official in charge of efforts to promote the welfare of animals, Ono felt responsible for the fate of the pets left in the Fukushima no-go zone.

He decided to do what he could to improve the situation. He seized stray dogs and fed animals, which was officially banned.

The rules concerning the protection of animals by the prefectural government require all animals picked up to be taken into the shelter as a first step. But Ono sometimes broke the rules and handed pets directly to their owners at a meeting place of residents making a temporary return home, when owners strongly requested such an arrangement.

Despite his commitment to the welfare of animals, Ono postponed trying to pick up cats in the zone.

Employees of local governments have the legal power to seize stray dogs under the Rabies Prevention Law, but not other pet animals.

Ono was not certain what he should and could do to protect cats in the evacuation zone when he had no legal authority to seize them.

It was also difficult to distinguish pet cats from ownerless ones, and there were no traps for felines available. As a result, Ono was reluctant to take any action to deal with the problem of cats roaming around the area near the nuclear power plant.

Cats, however, turned out to have a greater ability to stay alive and had more propagating power than dogs. The population of cats in the no-go zone kept growing, eventually creating a serious headache for both the prefectural and central governments.

Seido Watanabe, a vet in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, was temporarily involved in the pet rescue mission.

At that time, no trap was used to take pets into custody. The rescuers would only seize animals that approached them.

Feeling that the approach adopted to tackle the challenge was tepid and inefficient, Watanabe made a proposal directly to the Environment Ministry official serving as the contact person for the program.

The plan for the pet rescue mission said the central government should carry out the mission with the help of the Fukushima prefectural government. That meant the Environment Ministry was in charge of implementing the plan, while the actual work was done by local government employees.

Watanabe proposed to the ministry official that local residents who were acquainted with the neighborhood should be employed for the operation. He also suggested a change in the method, saying the search for pets should focus on areas cited by the pet owners who had requested a search to find and protect their animals.

Watanabe's proposal was apparently not welcomed by the ministry official, as he was not asked to assist in the operation again.

The Environment Ministry recruited vets willing to take part in the rescue mission and compiled a list of more than 150 potential participants.

But the number of vets who actually took part in the operation was less than 20, including Watanabe. A majority of the vets on the list were never contacted.

Watanabe now wonders if the ministry was really serious about seeking the assistance of these vets.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (8)

May 8, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (8): Woman repeatedly rescued pets in the Fukushima off-limits zone

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305080006

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the eighth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

After the government on April 22, 2011, banned entry into a 20-kilometer radius from the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, declaring it to be an evacuation zone, many people still began to enter the area illegally to rescue pets left behind.

One of them was Mieko Yoshida, a 63-year-old cram school teacher who lived in Odaka Ward in the city of Minami-soma.

Yoshida was living with 12 cats when the nuclear disaster broke out at the plant in March 2011. Despite her desperate search, she couldn't find four of the cats that went missing amid the pandemonium created by the disaster. For Yoshida, who lives alone, they were all precious members of her family.

Yoshida started a one-woman campaign for the rescue and protection of pets left behind in the no-go zone.

When she stood in front of the city office, carrying a placard reading, “Give me back my family,” many pet owners approached her, saying, “The same here.”

Yoshida compiled a list of some 80 houses in the off-limits zone where pets had been left behind. She secretly went to these houses to feed and rescue the animals.

Her concern for the lives of these vulnerable animals outweighed her fear of radiation.

Police kept bolstering the barricades erected to keep people from entering the zone, but that didn’t deter Yoshida from her stealth animal rescue mission.

She was repeatedly spotted in the no-go zone by police and was forced to write many letters of apology. Unfazed, she kept entering the zone to help animals, convinced that she was doing nothing wrong.

In mid-April, the Environment Ministry was secretly exploring the possibility of allowing civilians to enter the 20-kilometer zone to rescue pets. But a team at the Cabinet Office, which the ministry sounded out about the idea, flatly ruled out any such possibility. That was not surprising given that the government was struggling to cope with the ongoing nuclear crisis, and even local residents were not allowed to enter the zone.

The ministry then considered asking police and the Self-Defense Forces to rescue pets left in the zone.

But the ministry decided against making such a request, according to Koji Okura, a 53-year-old official at the ministry’s Animal Welfare and Management Office.

“We thought a plan for the rescue of pets (by police and the SDF) while they were still searching for missing people would not be supported by the public,” says Okura.

In the end, it was decided that pets captured by owners and other residents while they returned temporarily to their homes within the evacuation zone under government permission would be placed into an animal shelter operated by the Fukushima prefectural government. By the end of August, when all local residents had returned home at least once under the government’s temporary homecoming program, some 460 animals had been taken into custody.

The problem was that not many of the owners were ready to take back their pets from the shelter. Most evacuees were living in conditions that didn’t allow them to take care of their pets. They were living in no-pets-allowed temporary housing or had moved out of Fukushima and couldn’t easily return to the prefecture.

Inevitably, the pet shelter remained overcrowded.

The prefectural government then recruited volunteers to take care of animals in the shelter in their own homes. Some 40 people, mainly outside the disaster-stricken prefecture, responded to the recruitment and offered to look after animals on behalf of their owners.

But none of the owners wanted their pets to be placed in the hands of strangers. They said they felt more reassured if their pets were protected by the prefectural government.

A veterinarian named Seido Watanabe had secured a former pachinko parlor that was now unused in Miharu, a town in the prefecture, as the building to house a second pet shelter. But the work to remodel the building into a shelter had been running well behind schedule.

As there was little room in the existing shelter for accepting additional animals while there was no other place to keep them, the prefectural government was unable to take any effective steps to rescue and protect the cats and dogs that were prowling around in the no-go zone and whose owners were unknown.

Asked about volunteers who braved the radiation danger to rescue animals in the evacuation zone, such as Yoshida, Okura said, “Honestly, we were grateful.”

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Asahi -The disaster and the animals (12)

May 17, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (12): Farmer finds it impossible to oppose killing of cattle

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305170017

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 12th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Starting in May 2011, veterinarian Seido Watanabe of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, repeatedly entered the no-entry zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant along with people affiliated with the nuclear power industry and Diet members.

He saw many dead cattle in their pens. Horrendous odors emanated from the enclosures, which were infested with maggots and flies. Seeing the scenes, however, Watanabe felt unmoved. "If the cattle died, their suffering ended here," he thought.

What did pain him was seeing cattle that were leisurely grazing, but would be soon put down.

Watanabe did not understand why the cattle had to be killed just because they were exposed to radiation. "We will return to Tomioka in the future," he thought. "Even if it is impossible to ship adult cattle, we could ship calves someday. By doing so, we will reconstruct our town. For the reconstruction, we should refrain from killing cattle."

Watanabe called livestock farmers who were acquaintances. Sometimes, he went to evacuation centers where those farmers were staying. In his discussions with them, he persuaded them not to give their consent to putting down their cattle.

Yasuaki Tashiro, 59, a livestock farmer of Tomioka, thought that what Watanabe was saying was correct. While working in the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, he was raising cattle with his wife. He even gave names to 12 head of cattle, and took care of them, petting their heads each day.

Though the cattle were "tools of his job," he regarded them the same as he did the pets he had affectionately taken care of for more than 10 years. Even if he was ordered by the central government to kill his cattle, he would not be able to obey the directive.

On a bus for evacuees' temporary return to their houses, however, Tashiro overheard the conversation of two passengers. "My storehouse for miso (fermented soybean paste) was damaged by cattle," one said. The other replied, "My garden trees were damaged."

Tashiro was shocked by the reality that roaming cattle were causing damage throughout the area, though the nuclear accident in reality was what created the situation.

Later, Tashiro knew that the Tomioka town office was receiving complaints about wandering cattle. He also heard a rumor that some residents were considering demanding that livestock farmers pay compensation.

“Is our desire not to kill our cattle preventing reconstruction (of our town)?” Tashiro asked himself. After thinking seriously about the issue, Tashiro called veterinarian Watanabe, and said, “It is impossible to continue opposing the killing of our cattle. We have to give up.”

Tashiro was eager to improve the quality of the meat and milk coming from cattle. His willingness was having a positive effect on other livestock farmers.

“If Tashiro, who was carefully taking care of his cattle, concluded that there is no other way except for killing them, I must respect his conclusion,” Watanabe thought.

On July 29, 2011, the veterinarian wrote in his diary, “White flag” (meaning surrender).

Some scientists and stock farm operators began to round up cattle, which had been exposed to radiation, without killing them to study any radioactive materials in their bodies. However, Watanabe began to distance himself from such activity.

Asahi - The disaster and the animals (11)

May 15, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (11): Farmers told not to kill cattle

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305150009

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 11th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

In May 2011, veterinarian Seido Watanabe of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, was calling several livestock farmers, telling them, “You don’t have to kill your cattle.”

He made the calls after the government announced on May 12 that it would put down cattle in no-entry zones around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after obtaining consent from their owners.

Watanabe was originally a veterinarian for “wagyu,” or Japanese cattle. Succeeding his father, he examined more than 1,000 head of cattle a year, the largest number among veterinarians in neighboring areas.

Tomioka town is the site of one of the four livestock markets in Fukushima Prefecture. The average trading prices of calves in the market were the highest in the entire Tohoku region in the 1970s. It was not unusual for a calf to be priced at more than 1 million yen (about \$10,000).

As the number of people who worked in the nuclear plants increased, however, the number of people who kept cattle decreased. The market remained as the only livestock one in the eastern part of the prefecture. However, the ranks of livestock farmers decreased as their members aged.

As a result, the number of head of cattle traded at auctions, which are held in the market six times a year, often fell below 200 per auction, a rough minimum standard. The average price per head also fell into the range between 400,000 yen and 450,000 yen.

Watanabe was shifting the focus of his job to examination of pet animals. But his work with cattle held a special meaning for him.

The main job of cattle veterinarians is breeding. The gestation period of female bovines is about 10 months. In order to efficiently breed them, it is necessary to impregnate the cow again within two months after giving birth.

Cooperation with livestock farmers is vital for veterinarians for successful artificial insemination, since they must be notified of signs of the cow's estrus period, which lasts only two days.

The veterinarians give detailed instructions to those farmers on various issues, such as how to give feed to cattle and how to choose sperm. If calves were sold at high prices, the veterinarians shared the joy with the farmers.

"I was thinking that I was responsible for half of the income of the farmers," Watanabe said.

Farmers trusted Watanabe and would even tell him about problems they were having with their families, such as concerns about their sons' futures or difficulties with their sons' wives. "My main job with livestock farmers is counseling," he sometimes thought. Such close ties with farmers became an incentive for him to help them.

On days when cows were likely to give birth, he was summoned by farmers even at midnight. Because of that, he often had to give up going on family trips or even events at his daughters' schools.

Due to the March 2011 nuclear accident, about 3,500 head of cattle were left behind in the no-entry zones. Until the areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were designated as no-entry zones, Watanabe repeatedly went to some cattle pens there to deliver feed. However, the amount was insufficient, and subsequently, one bovine after another died.

Meanwhile, some cattle began to wander in the no-entry zones. They could escape from their pens because electrified fences were not working due to blackouts or volunteers working for animal protection opened the enclosures.

However, the cattle that left their pens were eventually put down.

Watanabe paid careful attention to the conditions for putting down the livestock—the government "must obtain consent from owners."

Tomoki Imai & Fukushima

May 19, 2013

Fukushima photos focus on what can't be seen

by Ken Kawashima

Special To The Japan Times

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http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2013/05/19/general/fukushima-photos-focus-on-what-cant-be-seen/#.UZiT_OpsFEs

Photographer Tomoki Imai has been a blur of activity since we reached the lookout point halfway up 601-meter Mount Higakure in the Futaba district of Fukushima Prefecture. Despite it being late April, with cherry blossoms in the forests and hamlets lower down, snow flurries and freezing conditions in the mountains the day before made long-range shooting virtually impossible. So Imai was in a hurry to make up for lost frames.

After some pre-production work — kicking away knee-deep snow on the observation deck and removing twigs and branches in his line of fire — the 39-year-old artist finally pauses. Then, looking up from the ground-glass eyepiece of his vintage camera, he gazes at the subject of his scenic portraits for the past two years: the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant leaking radioactivity on the horizon just 12 km away.

Daytime access to certain mountains on the outskirts of the town of Okuma, where the stricken Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) plant is located, was finally lifted in December last year — some 21 months after the Great East Japan Earthquake that triggered the nuclear catastrophe. Since then, this is the closest Imai has ever got to the focus of his artistic quest.

Back in the immediate aftermath of the disaster — prompted by news that a statutory 20-km exclusion zone would come into force around the plant on April 22, 2011 — Imai went up to Fukushima Prefecture on April 21 from his home in Tokyo 280 km away to the south. On that first shooting trip he climbed Mount Tekura, 18 km from the Tepco plant, to get an unobstructed view from its 631-meter peak.

“I wanted to stand there and see the No. 1 plant with my own eyes,” Imai explains, adding that it is now exactly two years since that day — and this will be his final Fukushima shoot because he’s decided it’s time to get on with other projects.

More importantly, the methodology he has employed since that day in 2011 — simply pointing his camera directly toward the epicenter of the three reactor meltdowns from distant mountaintops — became the core concept for his exhibition at the Taka Ishii Gallery of Photography and Film in Tokyo’s Roppongi district earlier this year, and for his recently published photo book “Semicircle Law” (Match and Co. Ltd.).

The culmination of two years’ work, “Semicircle Law” — unlike the apocalyptic images now generally associated with Fukushima’s nuclear tragedy — reflects a more subtle approach Imai resolved on

adopting. Hence, during each of his nearly 20 visits to the region, he donned hiking boots and — toting his large-format camera and a tripod — climbed 18 peaks within a 30-km semicircular radius of the coastal Tepco plant (because the other half of the semicircle is over the Pacific). Once there, he checked the compass bearing and trained his lens on the nuclear facility.

However, among the book's 25 landscape photographs, the infamous, wrecked block-shaped reactor buildings are rarely to be seen. And if they're visible at all, it's as little more than tiny specks on the distant shoreline.

Instead, in Imai's book the nuclear plant is presented as a nonentity: clouded over by an overcast sky or lost in a summer haze in many shots; hidden behind a birch tree or an autumnal hillside in some; or framed by snow-laden firs in others.

So for "Semicircle Law," as its nonspecific title seems to suggest, it's not a criterion that the nuclear plant is clearly visible — or indeed, present at all — in its images. According to Imai, though, what is of major importance is what lies beyond those images — whether we see it or not. It was an idea he happened on in his darkroom.

"When I first climbed up the mountain, I remember being really nervous and scared," he recalls. "But when the photos actually started coming out, I realized that the prints didn't necessarily reflect all the trepidation I felt.

"So then I realized how my view of Fukushima was being distorted by all the TV images and the information we were being bombarded with at the time — when, in actuality, the view from the mountaintop was quite pretty to look at. I found that disconnect very interesting."

As singular as that approach may seem, it's not so surprising for an artist who has, over more than a decade, created a signature style shooting often eerie studies of forbidding forests, empty streets and deserted urban landscapes ever since the publication of his first book, "In The Middle of The Day" (2001), which sought to extract the sublime from the most mundane scenes of city and rural life.

However, for his Fukushima project Imai says the idea of photographing buildings or rubble in the devastated northeastern Tohoku region of Honshu never seriously crossed his mind.

"First, there were many restrictions on where I could go, so the cities were kind of out of the equation to begin with," he explains. "But once I started taking photographs in the mountains, I realized that was another valid way to document the ongoing aftermath of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

"So, the mountains may appear pretty, but even these locations are contaminated by radiation as well — and I thought that approach was more me."

It is this juxtaposition — the radioactive elephant in the beautiful room of nature, as it were — that invests his otherwise picturesque and seasonal shots of lush forests, valleys and foliage with a haunting, invisible presence.

As if to prove Imai's point, the trail to our lookout point on Mount Higakure from the Sakashita Dam — which was a popular fishing spot for carp and smelt before the reactor meltdowns — offered stunning panoramic views of Fukushima's Abukuma mountain range and the Pacific coastline. Yet, though radiation will force residents to regard the landscape quite differently for an untold time to come, at first glance it's as if contamination has yet to taint the cyclical nature of Mother Earth in these parts.

But then that reality intrudes. Returning to the base of the mountain overlooking the manmade lake behind the dam, we find a public radiation-monitoring post indicating a reading of 0.44 μ Sv/hour — roughly 40 times the level in Tokyo on the same day.

Moving on from there, before heading back to Tokyo we decide to drop by the abandoned tsunami-ravaged town of Tomioka, which had been off-limits until just recently. There, a mere 10 km from the

nuclear plant, we were chastened to find the radiation readings were almost 10 times those by the dam — some 400 times Tokyo levels at the same time on the same day.

Meanwhile, though casual visitors in such irradiated parts may see evidence of the government's decontamination efforts and think effective programs are being carried out, it doesn't take an expert to realize other new problems are kicking in.

For instance, though dozens of cleanup workers were filling plastic bags with contaminated mud and leaves from hillsides and roads in deserted areas of Futaba close to Tepco's plant, it was deeply disturbing to see huge mounds of those bags filled with radioactive waste dotting the landscape with nowhere to go. Though Imai has decided to part ways with Fukushima for now, sights like that produced hints he may like to return with his camera in the future. In the meantime, he is worried that the majority of Japanese people south of Tohoku are already starting to forget about the troubles up north.

"There is this really bad tendency for Japanese people to easily get fired up about an issue and then completely forget about it once another topic takes its place," was how Imai put it when asked about the evident lack of momentum behind anti-nuclear protests nationwide compared with last year.

"That's one of the reasons why I started this project — I, myself, didn't want to forget," he explains.

And indeed, as Imai so well reflects in "Semicircle Law," Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant — and myriad issues connected with it — remain largely an enigma for individuals to ponder and figure out. That's except for one page in the book, perhaps — one at the end where he provides an indexed map precisely citing the place each photograph was taken from, and when, and the distance from there to the nuclear plant. And that, he says, is what is truly important.

"Even in Tokyo, after just two years, people are finding it more convenient to simply forget the issue," Imai points out. "So what I'm attempting to do by focusing each photo in the direction of the nuclear plant is remind people, like hey, it's right over here — whether you see it or not. If you head straight in the direction I'm shooting, that is where the nuclear reactors lie.

"All I am simply doing is pointing people that way. And if my photos help to input the image of the nuclear reactors inside people's heads, I think I will have made a small contribution towards positive change for Fukushima."



Asahi - The disaster and animals (13)

May 20, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (13): Farmer offers flowers, apology to slain cattle

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305200006

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 13th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

On March 21, 2012, a tranquil blue sky spread far and wide over Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture. However, it was in sharp contrast to the stormy mood of Yasuaki Tashiro, a livestock farmer in the town. He was going to force himself to watch the killing of four of his cattle, which had been rounded up. Though it was not his duty to do so, he thought that he should be a witness to it.

The four bovine were brought to a playing field owned by Tashiro. Including those, about 20 head of cattle were surrounded by men in protective gear.

“They (the four) are my cattle,” Tashiro, 59, thought.

Although it was the first time in a year that he had seen them, he knew immediately that they were his. But he did not feel like approaching them and stroking their heads, as he used to. Therefore, he watched them being put down from a distance.

Veterinarians in protective gear anesthetized the cattle through blow darts. The cattle winced when hit, which suggested they felt pain. Then, they collapsed to their knees while uttering muffled cries. After that, muscle relaxant shots were quickly administered to them.

It took several minutes to put down one bovine. Without creating a stampede, the cattle were killed one after another. Every time a blow dart flew through the air and hit its target, Tashiro felt pain in his heart as if the projectile had struck his own chest.

Tashiro chose to bury his four cattle in his rice field, located several hundreds of meters away from his house. He did not want to bury them in a location that could be seen from his home. He offered incense sticks and flowers to the four, and apologized to them.

Tashiro previously hoped to revive the cattle industry in the Futaba area, including Tomioka town, which used to be the largest breeding area of wagyu (Japanese cattle) in the entire Tohoku region.

The number of calves that were put on auctions in the Futaba livestock market was decreasing. The number of buyers was also declining, as well as the average prices of winning bids.

“The Futaba livestock market will be closed in the future. If you sell your calves in different markets in Fukushima Prefecture, you can sell them at prices that are 100,000 yen to 200,000 yen (about \$1,000 to \$2,000) higher (than those at the Futaba market),” another livestock farmer told Tashiro.

A movement to leave the Futaba market spread among local livestock farmers, and Tashiro was asked to join the effort. However, he thought, “I am still young. A person like me must not forsake our local market.”

To help rebuild the local livestock industry, Tashiro started a young livestock farmers’ group, called “B-Eco Net,” in 2006. (“Beko” in Japanese means cattle.)

Around May every year, members of the group released nearly 30 head of pregnant cattle in deserted arable land in Tomioka town. They changed the location of the release every week for about seven to eight months.

As a result, the coats of the cattle became shinier, and it also became easier for the dairy cattle to deliver calves. In addition, the release of the cattle prevented the arable land from getting run-down. As a result, the group received an award from the Fukushima prefectural government.

Members of the group held a meeting a month before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011, triggering the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in the prefecture.

They discussed holding events, such as an exhibition of children’s drawings and an eating party of newly harvested rice, in the Futaba livestock market on the day of an auction. However, the plans were suspended due to the disaster.

In the realignment of the no-entry zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, conducted in late March this year, Tashiro’s lands were included in an area where residential use is limited. At the earliest, it will be another four years until he can return home.

“At that time, will my lands have returned to a state where I can raise cattle? Will I still have the mental toughness to work as a livestock farmer?” Tashiro is thinking about those issues while doing the decontamination job he started five months ago.

* * *

Hula Fukushima

May 19, 2013

Fukushima's Hula Girls teach pupils positive attitude with dance

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201305190012>

By GEN HASHIMOTO/ Staff Writer

FUKUYAMA, Hiroshima Prefecture—The famed Hula Girls have started sharing their experiences of the 2011 disasters at elementary schools across the nation, beginning with a visit to children here on May 17.

The hula dancers, from leisure facility "Spa Resort Hawaiians" in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, are giving special lessons for third- and fourth-grade students. The women demonstrate the hula dance and talk about their experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake, which devastated their local area in March 2011. They also discuss the current state of Fukushima Prefecture and reconstruction efforts with children to get them thinking about the importance of working hard and not giving up.

Fukuyama Minami Elementary School was chosen as the first class thanks to an ongoing exchange between the city and Iwaki. This program has included sending Fukuyama public officers to Iwaki as backup members after the disaster.

About 60 third-grade students attended the class. Three of the dancers performed a hula dance set to the original song "Aina Fukushima," composed to express their feelings for home, and the pupils learned the hand movements of the hula dance.

Rice intended for sale in no-go zone

May 20, 2013

Rice planted in former no-go zone

District in Tamura first to resume farming near Fukushima No. 1

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/20/national/rice-planted-in-former-no-go-zone/#.UZnk2EpsFEs>

TAMURA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Farmers in the city of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, have begun planting rice in a district once designated a no-go zone because of radioactive fallout ejected by the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

It is the first time since the March 2011 core meltdowns that rice intended for sale has been planted in any former hot zone within 20 km of the power plant.

Saturday's rice planting was carried out in Tamura's Miyakojimachi district, about 15 km from the plant. In all, three farms are planning to seed 6 hectares there.

Miyakojimachi was reclassified in April 2012 as an area where evacuation orders might be lifted. Residents can enter without permission during the daytime but aren't allowed to stay overnight.

In their rice paddies, work to clean up radioactive fallout ejected by crippled power station has already finished. The farmers use fertilizer containing potassium to help reduce the amount of cesium absorbed by the rice plants.

All of the rice grown in the paddies will be given radiation checks before shipment.

Hisao Tsuboi, 62, one of the farmers, plans to plant Hitomebore and two other rice varieties on 2.5 hectares this year.

"Looking at the paddies turning green, I finally got the feeling that I have engaged in farming," Tsuboi said with a smile.

On Saturday, his eldest son planted rice using a tractor. Five local policemen and a man from Miyagi Prefecture who has been a buyer of Tsuboi's rice helped out.

But Tsuboi said that he is concerned because he has to leave his temporary house for his rice paddies at 4 a.m. every day and return home late at night. It takes an hour to drive from the temporary house to the rice paddies. Therefore, Tsuboi says he is not sure if he can continue working until the harvest in autumn.

“I want to ask the municipal authorities to allow me to stay at my own house for several days a week,” Tsuboi said.

Controlling water supply in the paddies is very important for growing rice, and the work is difficult if the farmers live far away, an official at the Fukushima Prefectural Government said, adding that allowing farmers to stay overnight is a task it needs to consider.

Among the former no-go zones, Miyakojimachi is the only district where decontamination has been completed, according to Fukushima Prefecture and the agriculture ministry.

Waters to the south more radioactive than to the north (of the plant)

May 21, 2013

Fishermen net fish in Fukushima waters to measure radiation levels

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201305210005>

By HIROSHI KAWAI/ Staff Writer

A fishing vessel from Fukushima Prefecture caught fish in waters south of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on May 20 to test them for levels of radiation contamination, as local fishing cooperatives hope to soon resume fishing in the area.

The No. 12 Akira Maru belonging to the Iwaki fishermen’s cooperative trawled plenty of flatfish and other species.

Due to ocean currents, the concentration of radioactive materials has been found to be higher in waters to the south of the plant, than to the north.

Of the Akira Maru's catch, nine species of fish were kept as samples to measure radiation levels in them. The fishermen tested about 10 kilograms of each type and threw the rest back into the sea.

“It feels hollow to have to throw fish back into the sea, considering that they could fetch high prices,” Captain Akiyoshi Abe said.

Before the nuclear accident triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, waters off the prefecture were known as a good fishing area where more than 100 species could be caught.

Many local fisheries cooperatives have had to suspend operations since the nuclear accident.

No electricity price hikes before August

May 22, 2013

Tohoku Electric, Shikoku Electric won't hike rates until August at earliest

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/22/national/tohoku-electric-shikoku-electric-wont-hike-rates-until-august-at-earliest/#.UZuh3kpsFEs>

Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co. will likely be able to raise their household rates in August at the earliest, later than the two companies initially planned, due to a delay in the government's approval procedures, informed sources said Tuesday.

Tohoku Electric filed Feb. 14 for government approval for raising its electricity rates by 11.41 percent on average. Shikoku Electric made its request Feb. 20 for a 10.94 percent hike.

Both utilities were aiming to implement the rate hikes on July 1. To do that, they would need to obtain approval no later than June 20.

However, a panel at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is expected to take a long time finishing its study of the increases, the sources said. The rate hike plans then need to be checked by the Consumer Affairs Agency.

While the METI panel's study on requests for electricity rate hikes usually takes four months, its work has been bogged down by a flood of such requests by power utilities, according to the sources.

The two utilities' rate hikes may be eventually delayed into September as some officials are cautious about hikes in August, when electricity demand soars, the sources said.

Tohoku Electric is considering postponing its hike for business users, also planned for July, if the increase for households is delayed. Rate hikes for corporate users do not require government approval.

"We want the government to speed up the approval process," Tohoku Electric President Makoto Kaiwa said.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (14)

May 22, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (14): What about the happiness of dogs and cats?

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305220005

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 14th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Veterinarian Seido Watanabe, who for a time devoted himself to helping cattle left behind in the no-entry zone near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, decided now to spend his time saving dogs and cats. In October 2011, renovations of a former pachinko parlor shop in Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture, which had been found by Watanabe, were completed and it was put into service as the second shelter of the prefectural government's animal protection headquarters. He assumed the post of veterinarian in charge of managing animals there.

The building was much improved over the prefecture's first shelter, located in the Iinomachi district of Fukushima city, which was a rental warehouse.

Under the support of a pet-related business and other organizations, the second shelter, whose renovation cost about 90 million yen (about \$900,000), was equipped with an air-conditioning system. In addition, it had 78 spacious individual rooms for dogs and 40 similar rooms for cats. The roofed parking lot became an exercise area for dogs.

However, there were many challenges. The prefectural government did not try to contact the owners of the pets. It also prohibited Watanabe from vaccinating or treating the animals without informing the owners of the measures.

"If a problem occurs, the owners could file lawsuits against us," Watanabe quoted a prefectural government official as telling him.

In such a delicate situation, fire department officials came to the second shelter on an inspection one day. At that time, one of the officials asked Watanabe, "As a matter of course, you have given anti-rabies vaccinations to the dogs, haven't you?"

"Well ... yes," Watanabe replied vaguely. After the officials left the shelter, he immediately gave the vaccinations at his own discretion.

Even when Watanabe wanted to buy medicines for the animals, he had to complete intensive paperwork and submit it to the prefectural government. As a result, it took several days for him to actually place orders. It was also impossible for him to do blood tests or take X-rays.

If any animal in the shelter showed signs of illness, he transported them by car to an animal hospital in Sukagawa, also in Fukushima Prefecture, where his wife, Michiko, 54, a veterinarian, was working.

"The situation (in the second shelter) is worse than in field hospitals," Watanabe thought.

Due to long periods of wandering about, dogs and cats had strong appetites. Some dogs even consumed newspapers and blankets, and some cats ate the artificial "sand" that was placed for their toilets. In addition, parasitic insects, which are usually seen infesting amphibian species, were often found on cats. That was apparently because those cats ate frogs to survive.

Owners rarely came to take their pets with them or even to see them. As the owners did not abandon ownership, however, it was impossible to give the animals to new owners. The second shelter was like a free hotel for pets.

"I don't care even if this shelter is like a pet hotel. I will take care of the animals indefinitely," Watanabe, who was also living as an evacuee, initially thought.

Gradually, however, he began to have doubts.

"One year of a human's life is equivalent to four or five years for a dog or a cat. If they are confined in this shelter indefinitely, will they be happy?" he thought.

On the other hand, Watanabe had mixed emotions when owners came to the shelter to take their pets with them. As their owners were unable to return to their homes, many were living outside Fukushima Prefecture.

Watanabe felt he should celebrate an animal's departure from the shelter as normally, it was the best thing for pets when they were reunited with their owners. However, Watanabe was hoping that he would contribute to the reconstruction of the local area through taking care of pet animals. Therefore, he felt as if this "small hope" was slipping away.

Hundreds denied compensation

May 21, 2013

Hundreds seek damages in Japan nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130521p2g00m0dm075000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- Hundreds of residents and evacuees from just outside Fukushima say they have been unfairly denied full compensation despite high radiation levels in their area caused by Japan's 2011 nuclear disaster.

Nearly 700 residents from the Hippo district of Miyagi prefecture, just north of Fukushima, are demanding equal compensation to the residents of Fukushima prefecture where the accident occurred.

They demanded Tuesday that the nuclear plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., pay them an additional 70 million yen (\$690,000) in damages from the Fukushima Dai-ichi meltdowns and radiation fallout.

They say that some radiation levels in their area top those in Fukushima.

The government's basic compensation scheme only covers Fukushima residents. About 150,000 Fukushima residents are still displaced. Hundreds of them have filed separate claims seeking greater compensation.

Residents just outside Fukushima seek damages in nuclear crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201305210101>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Can this be good news?

May 25, 2013

Fukushima Prefecture's population grows for first time since nuclear accident

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201305250033>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--The population of Fukushima Prefecture increased over the previous month for the first time since the 2011 nuclear disaster, prefecture authorities said May 24.

As of May 1, the population had increased by 746 over the previous month.

The prefecture hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and large numbers of people evacuated after the accident triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

An official said the population increase is a sign that the exodus caused by the accident is coming to an end.

According to the prefectural government's statistics division, the population of the prefecture as of May 1 was 1,950,341, a drop of about 18,000 from the previous year and of about 74,000 from the pre-quake figure in March 2011.

Until 2011, population figures as of May 1 had shown an increase every year over the previous month as people moved into the prefecture because of new employment or job transfers.

After the nuclear crisis began, however, figures showed that trend had reversed, with more people moving out than in.

Officials said the number of people moving into the prefecture in April surpassed those who moved out by 1,536 because of new employment and job transfers occurring at the start of the new fiscal year.

The prefecture saw a drop of 8,803 as of May 1, 2011, over the previous month, while the population plunged by 1,568 as of May 1, 2012.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (15)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (15): The veterinarian thought, 'They are stray cats, aren't they?'

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305240008

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 15th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The newly constructed second animal shelter in Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture, was insufficient to accommodate all the dogs and cats that were caught in the no-entry zones around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Therefore, the first shelter in Iinomachi district in Fukushima city, which used to be a rental warehouse, remained in use.

Kenji Shishido, a caretaker in the first shelter, was facing difficulties in dealing with dogs. Animals that were placed under protective custody after long periods of wandering loose had strengthened their hostility and fear toward humans.

When a dog, whose owner was unknown, was brought to the first shelter in February 2012, it acted aggressively toward Shishido. As the dog had been too violent, it had been given an anesthetic injection before being transported.

Though the dog was lethargic due to the anesthesia, it still acted in a threatening manner toward humans by baring its teeth. As the dog's facial expression was like that of a devil, Shishido named it "Oni" (devil).

In a week, however, Oni became acquainted with Shishido. When the dog came out of its cage quietly at the time of cleaning, Shishido praised Oni, saying, "You're a good child." The canine, which used to be kept as a pet, had not lost its ability to trust humans.

In March 2012, the Environment Ministry intensively caught pet animals in the no-entry zones with traps by entrusting the work to related organizations.

Until then, the ministry had put priority on placing dogs and cats, whose owners were known, in protective custody. As a result, the capturing of animals whose owners were unknown had been delayed. In particular, the collection of cats had been placed on the back-burner.

In late 2011, the ministry caught about 330 dogs and cats by using private-sector volunteers. At that time, however, it was estimated that 100 dogs and several hundred cats were still left behind in the no-entry zones. It would be necessary to catch them before the start of the spring breeding season, or their numbers would multiply even more. Therefore, the ministry implemented an intensive collection effort in March 2012.

Nearly 100 cats were caught in the initial stage. To accommodate so many cats, new cages, whose floor space measured 60 centimeters by 60 centimeters, were piled up in the second shelter though it was equipped with spacious individual rooms for dogs and cats.

The schedule for catching dogs and cats until March 19, 2012, had been set. However, the ministry decreased the number of traps. In addition, when cats that were apparently born after the Great East Japan Earthquake were caught in the traps, staff members would set them free on the spot.

After the intensive collection of animals, the ministry did not undertake a similar effort for six months.

The ministry planned to construct a new simple shelter near the second shelter by the end of May 2012. However, construction was delayed as the Fukushima prefectural government pointed out that the foundation portion of the planned new facility was weak.

In late July, four prefabricated sheds were finally completed. However, the ministry refrained from scheduling an intensive roundup of animals in August on the grounds that there was a consecutive Bon holiday period in the month.

In September, the ministry conducted another intensive collection effort. In about a month, it caught one dog and 131 cats. Many of the felines apparently did not have any previous contact with humans.

It was decided that veterinarian Seido Watanabe, who was in charge of managing animals in the second shelter, would take care of them.

“They are stray cats, aren’t they?” Watanabe thought.

They were apparently from first- or second-generation litters born to cats that had been kept as pets. They could not be called “evacuees’ pets” any more. However, they were born as the result of the delay in collecting animals in the no-entry zone.

“Do we need to include those cats?” Watanabe thought, while looking at felines that were so fearful of humans that they would cower in the corners of their cages.

* * *

UN criticises Japan's health management after Fukushima disaster

May 27, 2013

Expand health survey beyond Fukushima: U.N.

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/27/national/expand-health-survey-beyond-fukushima-un/#.UaJb1NhBpg4>

GENEVA – Japan’s health survey on the effects of the March 2011 nuclear crisis should be expanded to include areas outside Fukushima Prefecture, a U.N. expert said.

The health management survey should be provided to residents in all affected areas by radiation exposure higher than 1 millisievert per year, Anand Grover, the U.N. special rapporteur on health, said in a report.

The report disputed the Japanese government’s decision to allow business activities to resume in areas with an exposure of 20 millisieverts or less per year.

“Evacuees should be recommended to return only when the radiation dose has been reduced as far as possible and to levels below 1 millisievert per year,” the report said.

Epidemiological studies “conclude that there is no low-threshold limit for excess radiation risk to non-solid cancers such as leukemia,” it said.

The report will be submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council on Monday.

The report criticized the Japanese government for failing to give prompt orders for administering stable iodine to the public after the core meltdowns began at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

The report also said Japan failed to utilize the System for Prediction of Environment Emergency Dose Information, the computer simulator dubbed SPEEDI that projects the environmental spread of radioactive fallout, in a timely manner.

Many people who evacuated Fukushima to escape the fallout from the meltdowns ended up fleeing to places that were directly in the fallout paths projected by SPEEDI.

Atomic plan suspense

Kyodo

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe won’t clarify his plan to reactivate nuclear power plants until it appears in the growth strategy to be released in mid-June just before the Upper House election in July, sources familiar with the matter said.

The draft energy policy states that steps will be taken to restart reactors deemed safe by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, the sources said Saturday.

The government will pledge to make utmost efforts to ensure safety at atomic power stations to gain support for restarting them in the municipalities that host them, they said.

May 26, 2013

U.N. expert urges help for Japan's nuclear victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201305260047>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A United Nations expert who investigated the aftermath of Japan's 2011 nuclear power plant disaster says the government and the operator of the facility should do more to help those affected by the catastrophe.

A report by special rapporteur Anand Grover, posted on the U.N. Human Rights Council's website, says the government's takeover of Tokyo Electric Power Co. allowed the utility to evade full responsibility for the nuclear disaster, the worst since Chernobyl.

The report points to problems with the handling of the crisis, including a difficult process for seeking compensation for radiation exposure, a lack of openness about health risks from radiation and inadequate protection for nuclear plant workers.

It urges Japan to improve its emergency preparedness and its handling of compensation claims.

The Geneva-based council is due to discuss the report, compiled after a visit to Japan by Grover late last year, at its general meeting starting on May 27.

Japan's atomic energy industry remains in crisis more than two years after a powerful earthquake and tsunami triggered meltdowns in three reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Over the weekend, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency reported a radiation leak at a research lab in the northern Japan town of Tokaimura, where at least two previous radiation accidents have occurred.

The U.N. report cited a number of "serious challenges" and urged the government to involve affected communities in decisions and do more to protect and help vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, the disabled and the elderly.

Most of Japan's nuclear plants remain closed after being shut down for safety checks following the Fukushima disaster. TEPCO and other utilities are accumulating massive losses due to reduced revenue and because of the costs of natural gas and crude oil to generate power.

Although TEPCO, the main power provider for the Tokyo region, was legally responsible for any liabilities from its nuclear operations, the government took over its management in the wake of the crisis.

That acquisition of a majority stake in the company "has arguably helped TEPCO to effectively avoid accountability and liability for damages," the U.N. report said.

Originally, seeking compensation involved a 60-page application form with 2,215 sections, the report said. Although the process has since been streamlined, the report said the government should address concerns over "TEPCO's attempts to reduce compensation levels and delay settlement."

The compensation should include financial relief to help the tens of thousands of residents displaced by the disaster rebuild their lives, it said.

So far, TEPCO has paid 2.3 trillion yen (\$22.5 billion), about half of it to companies and business owners. That amount includes 1.6 million individual claims, mostly from voluntary evacuees. Because the amount of claims is expected to exceed the initial estimate of 3 trillion yen (\$29 billion), the government has injected an additional 154 billion yen (\$1.5 billion) into the compensation fund.

About 150,000 Fukushima residents are still displaced. Hundreds have filed claims seeking greater compensation, including many living outside the prefecture.

See also :

UN expert urges help for Japan's nuclear victims

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130526p2g00m0in044000c.html>

No more no-go zone

May 28, 2013

All no-entry zones in Fukushima now revised

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130528_10.html

The boundaries of the last remaining no-entry zone near the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant have been revised, giving former residents access to at least part of their community.

The town of Futaba co-hosts the Fukushima Daiichi power plant that suffered a meltdown accident in the March 2011 quake and tsunami. All of the townspeople have been forced to evacuate.

At midnight Monday, Futaba was reorganized into 2 zones based on levels of radiation. Most of the town will remain barricaded, with residency restricted indefinitely. But for the first time since the disaster, former residents can now enter the remaining coastal area, although overnight stays remain prohibited. Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa said his community has finally taken its first step toward reconstruction. He said the town will proceed with decontamination work, and consult the government about rebuilding areas ravaged by the tsunami.

The entire 20-kilometer no-entry area around the crippled nuclear plant has now been reorganized into 3 types of zones. The aim is prepare for the return of former residents in places where radiation levels are relatively low.

May 28, 2013 - Updated 01:21 UTC

Last no-go zone designation lifted in Fukushima Prefecture

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130528p2g00m0dm038000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The Japanese government lifted the last no-go zone designation in Fukushima Prefecture on Tuesday, more than 26 months after the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The town of Futaba, the last no-go zone, has been reorganized into zones where residents' return is viewed as difficult and those where preparations can be made for the lifting of evacuation orders.

No-gone zones located within 20 kilometers of the devastated nuclear plant were designated in nine municipalities in April 2011 and were gradually eliminated.

But zones where residents' return is viewed as difficult are still in force in a wide area around the plant. All residents of Futaba, numbering 6,520, have evacuated from the town, with its municipal government now located in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo.

The zones where residents' return is viewed as difficult due to estimated annual radiation exposure exceeding 50 millisieverts cover 96 percent of the town's former population and area.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (16)

May 27, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (16): Veterinarian haunted by slow start to dealing with animals

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305270008

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 16th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

If he had a do-over, veterinarian Seido Watanabe would have moved much quicker in dealing with the pets of evacuees in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear accident.

By December 2012, the animal shelter Watanabe was in charge of in Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture, housed a record 270 cats, of which more than 100 were born after the disasters.

Because some of the animals had no human contact, the cats would strike back at their captors out of fear. That made even feeding the animals a major chore. Shelter staff had to use poles to place and remove trays from the cages.

The pets of evacuees as well as stray animals all were important to him, but Watanabe could not help but feel emptiness at times, especially when pet owners told horror stories arising from their lives as evacuees.

Watanabe and his wife, Michiko, resumed operations at their pet hospital in Koriyama on Dec. 4, 2012.

However, municipalities had different policies concerning pets.

Iitate and Iwaki banned pets at their temporary housing facilities. However, most other municipalities allowed pet owners to bring their animals, but set up special rules, such as placing all such owners in the same temporary housing building.

Problems were rampant. Temporary housing usually meant cramped quarters with thin walls. One dog owner received complaints about barking and began to think that the animal would have to be put to sleep.

Another pet owner kept giving snacks to the dog to stop it from barking. The animal quickly became obese.

A woman who had evacuated from Namie and lived by herself kept her 18-year-old dog in her car. The apartment that had been provided for evacuees did not allow pets. The woman kept the engine running so the air conditioner would be on around the clock. She looked after her pet until it died in February.

Because many pet owners faced difficulties even after they had evacuated, Watanabe came up with the idea of temporarily taking in such pets at the animal shelter. He felt that even a temporary respite would be a welcome relief to the pet owners. Watanabe wanted to do something about the difficulties being caused by the pets, which would normally be valuable partners in the daily lives of their owners.

However, with so many dogs and cats already being kept in the animal shelter, there was little leeway for taking in pets.

Watanabe could only feel frustration at not being able to do anything.

When the project began to rescue pets from the no-entry zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, about 50 days had passed since the start of the nuclear accident. That was more than enough time for pets that had been left tied up or kept indoors to die.

During the hot days of summer, it became more difficult to round up animals because they remained out of sight to avoid the heat. Eventually, the number of cats began increasing through mating. That led to a downward spiral of not being able to keep pace with the capture of animals for their protection.

Over 10,000 claims for compensation

May 30, 2013

Town near Fukushima nuclear plant seeks more compensation for residents

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201305300074>

By YU KOTSUBO/ Staff Writer

The Namie municipal government, acting on behalf of its residents, asked an independent organization on May 29 to more than triple monthly benefits for psychological suffering caused by the Fukushima nuclear accident.

It is the first time a local government has served as an agent for its residents in seeking compensation for the accident, according to lawyers representing the municipality. It was also the largest number of individuals to take part in the submission of an application to the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center, which was established by the central government.

Of the 21,000 residents of Namie at the time of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, 11,602 joined the group application submitted to the center.

The municipal government will shoulder the legal expenses involved in the process.

"I want (the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co.) to realize the direct distress suffered by residents who had to evacuate with only the clothes on their backs, as well as their dissatisfaction, worry and chagrin at having lost everything," Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba said at a May 29 news conference in Tokyo.

Under guidelines established by the central government, TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima plant, has been paying 100,000 yen (\$980) a month to each resident who was forced to evacuate. The payments will continue as long as residents lead lives as evacuees.

The figure was arrived at by referring to the approximately 120,000 yen monthly benefit that is paid through automobile liability insurance to those who are hospitalized as a result of traffic accidents.

In its request, the Namie municipal government argued that the figure was too low because it did not take into account the terrible damage caused by the nuclear accident, which forced residents to evacuate and broke up communities built up over many years. The application asked that monthly compensation for psychological duress be increased to 350,000 yen.

"We will respond seriously in the course of mediation procedures seeking a settlement," a TEPCO official said.

Many residents took part because there is still no indication on when they will be able to return to the homes they fled from more than two years ago.

Lawyers for the municipal government conducted a survey in which about 5,000 residents replied. About 3,100 said they were still suffering, with about 70 percent of them saying the main reason was uncertainty about their futures.

"It's not about the money," one resident who evacuated to Nihonmatsu, also in Fukushima Prefecture, said. "I want to show TEPCO, which caused this to happen, what the situation is like with the continued effects of the damage."

May 29, 2013

10,000 residents claim compensation in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130529_30.html

Namie Town has filed a petition with a government arbitration body demanding larger monthly compensation on behalf of more than 10,000 residents who were displaced by the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Town Mayor Tamotsu Baba and lawyers representing 11,602 people filed the claim on Wednesday, at the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center.

They represent more than half of Namie's residents who were evacuated from the town in March 2011, just after the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. They now live in various locations around the country.

Each evacuee receives about 1,000 dollars per month from Tokyo Electric Power Company. The amount is based on the guidelines of a government panel on damage compensation.

The petition argues that the families and communities were broken up by the evacuation. It says the residents lost their livelihoods and have no plans yet for how to recover.

The petition says the amount of compensation does not accurately reflect how much they have suffered from the unprecedented nuclear disaster. They are demanding roughly 3,500 dollars per month and a review of the current guidelines.

The town called on residents to join the group petition as residents do not have enough financial resources to individually sue TEPCO.

The lawyers say this is the first group petition represented by a municipality filed at the arbitration body. It is also the largest of its kind and more residents are expected to join the group. Baba says this is mainly a financial complaint but it also seeks public understanding of how difficult life is for the evacuees.

Who will actually come back?

May 28, 2013

Rezoning offers little hope for Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201305280081>

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

MOTOMIYA, Fukushima Prefecture--Masasuke Takadama hopes to someday place the ashes of his son, who died in the tsunami two years ago, in the family grave not far from the crippled nuclear plant.

His home in the Nakahama district of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, was also swept away by the tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.

While the town has been off-limits since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, former residents are being allowed to visit three coastal districts, including Nakahama, only during the day from May 28.

But the 59-year-old Takadama said he may not be able to rebuild his home due to the risk of tsunami.

"We cannot let our son rest in his grave," said Takadama, who is evacuating with his wife to Motomiya in the same prefecture. "We want to pray for the repose of his soul there as soon as possible."

His third son, Shinobu, died at the age of 27. He was studying English in the United States and returned to Futaba two days before the earthquake.

Shinobu's remains are on repose at a temple in Aizuwakamatsu, also in Fukushima Prefecture.

Takadama said he still feels regret because he and his wife, ordered to evacuate due to the nuclear accident, could not search for their son on their own.

More than a month after the earthquake, the couple was notified by police that Shinobu's body had been found amid rubble 500 meters from their home.

Town authorities hope that the rezoning on May 28 will speed up decontamination and infrastructure restoration to enable former town residents to live there again. But many people who lost their homes in the tsunami have bought new ones outside the town.

Takadama, who lost his job as a truck driver after the earthquake, said he will have no employment even if he returns.

Futaba was classified into two zones based on radiation levels. Only 4 percent of the town's population of 6,300 used to live in the three coastal districts.

Entry to the remaining areas will remain strictly limited, and former residents will not be allowed to return at the earliest until March 2017.

A woman in her 40s who used to live in one of those areas is evacuating to Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. She said she intends to become an Iwaki citizen and buy a new home once Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, pays her compensation for the disaster.

In Iwaki, where 24,000 have taken refuge due to the nuclear accident, friction has arisen between residents and evacuees over congestion at hospitals and a shortage of homes.

The woman said her acquaintance from outside the city was told by an Iwaki citizen that evacuees do not have money problems because they can receive compensation.

"I want to escape from being plagued by the feeling that evacuees are seen as someone entitled to compensation without having to do anything on their own," she said.

Futaba is the last of the nine municipalities within the former no-entry zone, or a 20-kilometer radius of the nuclear plant, that has been redesignated.

Seventy percent of the 77,000 who used to live in the nine municipalities have been allowed to return during the day, but the situation is largely unchanged.

Sadakazu Yuki, 60, who is evacuating to Iwaki, reopened a gas station in central Naraha he took over from his father 30 years ago soon after the town was reclassified in August.

The street was bustling before the nuclear disaster. In the morning, elementary school pupils would talk cheerfully on their way to school, and young parents would watch out for their safety.

Yuki now sees only vehicles for decontamination and infrastructure restoration work in the morning. Those vehicles account for more than 90 percent of his customers.

Homes and stores in the neighborhood remain deserted, and **bags containing radioactive waste are piled up everywhere.**

Town authorities plan to encourage former residents to return from next spring.

Yuki is pessimistic, however.

“We will not be able to see students going to school anymore,” he said. “I am afraid that only senior citizens would come back.”

Yuki’s second daughter lives in Iwaki with her husband and three children and still has lingering fears about the crippled nuclear plant, which faces decades of decommissioning and dismantling work ahead. The family has bought a new home there.

Yuki said he cannot keep his gas station open unless the town attracts a younger generation of new residents to settle there.

“When decontamination work is over in a couple of years, I might have to close it,” he said.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (17)

May 29, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (17): Volunteers seek new approach to handling strays

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305290011

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 17th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The series will conclude with the last story to be posted on May 31.

With no end in sight to the effort to round up animals in the vicinity of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, some volunteers began looking for a new strategy to protect the wandering dogs and cats.

Mieko Yoshida had been feeding pets left behind by their owners in the Odaka district of Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. From late 2012, she began a new approach called "TNR," which stands for trap, neuter and release, in dealing with stray cats. The method is considered one way to keep the cat population from exploding.

Yoshida turned to the new approach because she began to feel that it was irresponsible of her to simply feed the animals because that would only lead to further breeding. At the same time, because neutering one animal cost several tens of thousands of yen, Yoshida had to seek donations for her project. She could only handle about 10 cats a month.

From the end of March to April, the central government redefined areas around the crippled plant. Until then, all areas within a 20-kilometer radius were designated a no-entry zone. The redefinition meant a wider area in which residents could return to their homes, if even only during the day.

At the same time, stricter measures were implemented for those areas where residents could not enter because of high radiation levels. Barricades cut off access to those areas, making it harder for volunteers to look for animals.

While the Environment Ministry rounded up about 460 dogs and cats last year, officials have yet to decide on their policy for the current fiscal year. The budget for animals that were in the disaster areas was also greatly reduced from the last fiscal year to 30 million yen (\$300,000). Most of that money will go to operating animal shelters, meaning the ministry will likely be unable to conduct a similar campaign to round up stray animals.

Ministry officials are leaning toward allowing pet owners and volunteers to take animals under their protection in areas that are accessible.

On April 4, a van was donated to the shelter for the Fukushima prefectural animal protection headquarters where Seido Watanabe of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, was the veterinarian in charge. The vehicle came from a group of veterinarians and had a surgical table installed.

The van will allow Watanabe to carry out the TNR project while driving around Fukushima.

Watanabe has decided to continue to seek out animals left behind, even in those areas where residents are still prohibited from entering.

Another issue he will have to deal with is deciding when to close down the animal shelter. Although the conditions for the animals have vastly improved from the days when it first opened, the shelter has monthly operating costs of about 5 million yen. Watanabe did not think it would be a good idea to rely on donations to continue operating the shelter with no end in sight.

Even those cats that staff could not handle at first have become much more accustomed to human contact. More people have become new owners, with about 50 cats being claimed in the past three months.

When asked to describe his experiences since the disaster, Watanabe said, "It is like someone who is very thirsty and has been made to wait for a long time is finally given a rice ball."

The veterinarian used that description because he feels that after a long period when he did not receive the necessary support, he was finally given way more than what he originally expected.

With all that, Watanabe feels that the end to his animal-saving activities arising from the disaster may be near.

Crowds gather in Fukushima City for festivals

June 1, 2013

Tohoku summer festivals opens in Fukushima City

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130601_25.html

Thousands of people are in Fukushima City in northeastern Japan for a 2-day event combining 6 local summer festivals.

The event was first held 2 years ago to promote tourism in areas hard hit by the March 2011 disaster.

Fukushima City hosted this year's event.

Six aircraft from the Air Self-Defense Force aerobatic flight team, Blue Impulse, performed overhead, forming a heart with smoke. The unit has just returned to its base in Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, in March. The area was also devastated by the disaster.

A group of men from Fukushima Prefecture paraded through the streets carrying a huge straw sandal on their shoulders.

The other participating groups included participants from the Nebuta Festival in Aomori Prefecture known for its giant paper floats. Members of the Kanto Lantern Festival from Akita Prefecture carried tall bamboo poles and balanced lanterns on their hands and foreheads.

A resident said she is happy as this is the first time so many people have gathered in Fukushima City since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami as well as the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. She expressed hope for a quick recovery of her hometown.

The organizers of the event expect as many as 200,000 people will attend.

Asahi - The disaster and animals (18)

May 31, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ The disaster and animals (18): Lessons learned in helping animals after Fukushima disaster

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201305310007

By MISUZU TSUKUE/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the final part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with how pets and livestock fared in the evacuation zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The individuals who were involved in various ways with helping pets after the Fukushima nuclear disaster two years ago are trying to take advantage of the various lessons they have learned.

In late February, the animal shelter in Fukushima city's Iinomachi district was integrated into the one in Miharu and closed down.

That freed Kenji Shishido from his responsibilities in caring for the animals, a large step from the beginning when he was the only one at the shelter.

Shishido is not only an animal trainer, but he was also a breeder. In the past, when the only standard for determining value was whether a puppy would sell or not, Shishido felt that those animals with disabilities or illnesses were only useless lives.

However, his experience at the animal shelter made Shishido realize the error of placing a priority on his lifestyle rather than on the life of the animals. He now believes that there is no such thing as a useless life. He wants to reconsider how to deal with dogs in the future.

As a Fukushima prefectural government official, Takeshi Ono entered the no-entry zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant a total of 55 times to take dogs and cats into his protection. He left the Fukushima prefectural government in March 2012 and moved to Aichi Prefecture, where his wife is originally from. A major reason was concern about the health of his twin daughters in light of the radiation fallout.

Although Ono had been in a position to deal with pets during natural disasters, planning what to do was one of the last things he did. Not only was there little cooperation between the Fukushima prefectural veterinarians association, the Environment Ministry and private-sector organizations, but the prefectural government itself had not taken a unified stance in dealing with pets.

While he did feel frustration, Ono decided not to break new ground, in part because he was pessimistic about achieving anything.

Based on his experience, the former Fukushima official said, "The system or organization itself will not do the work. The only way is for people to join hands to move the process forward."

Ono has been able to find work as a local government official in Aichi. If given the opportunity, he would like to tell others of what he learned in Fukushima.

Koji Okura is an official with the Animal Welfare and Management Office in the Environment Ministry. He said the response in Fukushima was insufficient and slow. Based on those lessons, he feels that guidelines for dealing with pets during natural disasters should include two main points: owners should take their pets with them when evacuating; and government agencies should establish a structure for allowing pets at evacuation centers and in temporary housing facilities.

Seido Watanabe had a veterinary practice in Tomioka, but he continues to live in temporary housing in Koriyama. His home was only seven kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant. His innocent pet dog provided him with the will to live.

He believes if the animal was left behind, his family would likely not have remained bonded together psychologically.

Based on his experiences, Watanabe hopes all pet owners will understand that an important way to prepare for natural disasters is to vaccinate their pets and have them neutered. The most important thing, according to Watanabe, is for owners to take their pets with them when evacuating because the animals cannot live without their human masters.

The Fukushima prefectural animal protection headquarters took in about 1,000 dogs and cats under its protection. However, the number of animals that died is believed to be much greater.

While continuing to care for the pets at the animal shelter, Watanabe will also never forget all the lives that he was unable to save.

Mental damage entitled to compensation

June 3, 2013

Residents win radiation uncertainty compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130603_09.html

A group of nuclear accident evacuees in Fukushima has won a compensation settlement decision from a state-backed legal arbitration body for radiation exposure and future health uncertainties.

The Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center decided to recommend that Tokyo Electric Power Company pay damages to about 180 former residents of the Nagadoro District in Iitate Village.

Nagadoro is near the Fukushima nuclear plant where radiation levels remain high. It is the only district in Iitate that the government declared uninhabitable over the long term.

An evacuation order for the area was issued more than a month after the accident on March 11th, 2011.

The arbitrators accepted the residents' claim of fear and anxiety as they had lived without any protection against high radiation doses because of their delayed evacuation.

It was decided that TEPCO should pay about 10,000 dollars each to pregnant women and to those who are 18 years old or younger. The other residents would receive 5,000 dollars each.

The residents had already received compensation for having to evacuate, but the amount did not cover health anxieties.

The lawyers representing the residents said this is the first time for health anxiety compensation to be granted.

The district's chief administrator says the momentum is moving in the right direction. A TEPCO official says the utility will study the recommendation in detail.

Jun. 2, 2013 - Updated 22:54 UTC

Fukushima village residents to receive new compensation over mental damage

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130603p2a00m0na016000c.html>

An alternative dispute resolution (ADR) entity in charge of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has decided to approve compensation for mental damage from radiation exposure for about 180 residents in the Nagadoro district in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate.

Lawyers for the village residents said June 2 that the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center notified the residents and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) of its decision.

It is the first time that the center has given its stamp of approval for redress for mental damage from radiation exposure. The residents and TEPCO will initiate negotiations based on the center's approval and such talks are likely to affect other residents around the crippled nuclear power plant who are seeking compensation.

The 180-odd residents stayed in the Nagadoro district of southern Iitate for at least two days after March 15, 2011 when high-levels of airborne radiation were detected due to the nuclear crisis, their lawyers said, adding the center has proposed paying 500,000 yen each to ordinary residents and 1 million yen each to pregnant women and children aged 18 years or younger for mental damage from radiation exposure.

The proposed redress is separate from a monthly payment of 100,000 yen to Fukushima residents over mental damage from having been forced to evacuate from the nuclear disaster. The center advanced the redress proposal in late May.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government's disaster headquarters, airborne radiation levels shot up to 40 microsieverts per hour at the Iitate village office from March 15, 2011, following the onset of the nuclear disaster but the village was designated a no-go zone as late as April 22, 2011. Radiation levels in the Nagadoro district were particularly high. Even after a reclassification of contaminated areas in July last year, an annual accumulative radiation dose topped 50 millisieverts (about 9.5 microsieverts per hour), keeping the district a "difficult to return" zone.

The residents had demanded 5 million yen each for mental damage from radiation exposure. But Katsunobu Kobayashi, one of their lawyers, said, "Despite a limited amount of money, the center recognized the state's and TEPCO's responsibilities over radiation exposure despite their attempts to ignore them. It is socially important."

A TEPCO spokesman said the utility cannot comment on individual cases but hopes to appropriately deal with the case.

Separately, the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie has asked the center to approve compensation for mental damage from radiation exposure for over 10,000 town residents.

Rejoicing in Fukushima City

June 2, 2013

PHOTO: Fukushima packed with spectators enjoying 3rd combined Tohoku festival

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201306020017

By YUKIKO SEINO/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--More than 100,000 people gathered here June 1 to marvel at the spectacle of a procession of colorful festivals through downtown to honor the deceased in the 2011 quake and tsunami and pray for the rebuilding of the stricken Tohoku region.

The event, called the Tohoku Rokkon Festival, brings together the most well-known festivals in the six-prefecture region, including Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate, which were hit hard by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The two-day event, which continues June 2, is marking its third year after similar festivals in Miyagi Prefecture in 2011 and in Iwate Prefecture last year.

On opening day, the venue was inundated with an estimated 120,000 spectators, as about 1,000 participants of the Fukushima Waraji Festival, Yamagata Hanagasa Festival, Sendai Tanabata Festival, Morioka Sansa Odori Festival, Aomori Nebuta Festival and Akita Kanto Festival paraded through the central part of the city.

Fukushima Prefecture is still reeling from the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which followed the quake and tsunami. About 150,000 evacuees are forced to live in temporary housing.

The catchphrase for this year's event is "fuku," which means happiness in Japanese, to coincide with the venue, Fukushima, the prefectural capital

June 1, 2013

Tohoku summer festivals opens in Fukushima City

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130601_25.html

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The event was first held 2 years ago to promote tourism in areas hard hit by the March 2011 disaster.

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A group of men from Fukushima Prefecture paraded through the streets carrying a huge straw sandal on their shoulders.

The other participating groups included participants from the Nebuta Festival in Aomori Prefecture known for its giant paper floats. Members of the Kanto Lantern Festival from Akita Prefecture carried tall bamboo poles and balanced lanterns on their hands and foreheads.

A resident said she is happy as this is the first time so many people have gathered in Fukushima City since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami as well as the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. She expressed hope for a quick recovery of her hometown.

The organizers of the event expect as many as 200,000 people will attend.

Settlement for Fukushima suicidee's family

June 3, 2013

Fukushima family, TEPCO reach redress deal over farmer's suicide

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130603p2a00m0na015000c.html>

A bereaved family and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have reached a settlement for compensation over a 64-year-old farmer's suicide shortly after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, the family's lawyers say.

The settlement brokered by the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center, an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) organ, represents the first out-of-court settlement over a suicide stemming from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The deal is expected to affect civil cases in which bereaved families have filed lawsuits seeking redress for their loved ones' suicides.

TEPCO acknowledged the causal relationship between the suicide of the farmer in the Okambara district in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Sukagawa, and the nuclear crisis and reached the settlement with his family in May.

The lawyers said the farmer committed suicide after receiving a notice from the government on restricting cabbage shipments in the wake of the nuclear disaster. The lawyers started negotiations with TEPCO but the giant utility refused to admit a causal relationship, prompting the lawyers to take the case to the nuclear ADR entity in June 2012.

During oral proceedings, the farmer's family produced an expert opinion document and said the farmer expressed a feeling of despair in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster because of the ban on cabbage shipments. The family's arguments were believed to have led to the settlement. But a TEPCO spokesman declined comment.

An acquaintance who has known the farmer for about 20 years says the farmer had inherited the family farm and adhered to pesticide-free production of rice, cucumbers and other vegetables. He says he met the farmer about one week before he killed himself. The acquaintance said the farmer went about his life as usual but was probably shocked by the nuclear accident although he did not talk much about it.

The farmer's wife and their second eldest son have inherited the family farm.

Among suicides in the aftermath of the nuclear accident, a 58-year-old woman in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Kawamata committed suicide due to stress stemming from life in temporary housing and the losses of her job and house, leading her family to file a 91.2 million yen suit with the Fukushima District Court in May last year. A 54-year-old dairy farmer in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Soma took

his own life after facing a ban on milk shipments and the forced slaughter of dairy cattle. His family filed suit with the Tokyo District Court in May this year seeking 126 million yen in compensation.

Consolation money to place additional financial burden on TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306030093>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Compensation payments are expected to take a financial toll on Tokyo Electric Power Co. after redress cases strengthened for bereaved families and victims of stress caused by the Fukushima nuclear accident.

For the first time, a government-affiliated dispute resolution center decided to demand TEPCO, operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, pay compensation to residents for their anxieties over radiation exposure.

Also in a first, TEPCO has agreed to pay compensation to family members of a farmer who killed himself after the nuclear accident robbed him of his livelihood.

Lawyers for 180 residents of the Nagadoro district of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, located some 30 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, said June 2 that the science ministry's center for alternative dispute resolution had sided with their arguments.

The residents were told to evacuate more than one month after the nuclear disaster began on March 11, 2011, following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

They have demanded compensation for stress caused by their exposure to radiation during that period.

"It is understandable for the residents to feel anxiety and fear about their exposure to radiation," a lawyer quoted a center official as saying.

The lawyers said the center will tell TEPCO to pay 500,000 (\$4,977) per person, and 1 million yen each to pregnant women and children up to the age of 18.

The central government initially did not issue evacuation warnings for residents in a large part of Iitate, including the Nagadoro district, because it is located outside a 30-kilometer radius of the nuclear power plant.

Radiation levels in those areas were later found to be very high, and the residents who did not leave immediately received relatively high radiation doses.

The center also mediated between TEPCO and the family members of the farmer who committed suicide in Sukagawa in the prefecture.

TEPCO has decided to pay more than 10 million yen in compensation to the family, including consolation money and lost earnings, sources close to the family members said.

The farmer, then 64, had operated an organic vegetable farm for more than 30 years.

The central government imposed restrictions on certain kinds of vegetables grown in Fukushima Prefecture on March 23, 2011, immediately after the nuclear disaster started. At that time, the farmer had just entered the cabbage-picking season.

The following morning, the man hanged himself at the farm

.
His bereaved family in June last year asked the center to mediate a settlement with TEPCO, and the institution suggested an amount.

Early last month, TEPCO said it will accept the center's offer, but it refused to apologize to the family members as demanded.

Other families have also blamed TEPCO for the suicides of family members.

And the Namie municipal government, acting on behalf of 11,602 residents, has asked the center to more than triple monthly benefits for psychological suffering caused by the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The application asked that TEPCO's monthly compensation for psychological duress be increased to 350,000 yen from current 100,000 yen.

Revision of evacuation guidelines in case of nuclear accidents

June 5, 2013

Nuclear evacuation guidelines updated

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130605_18.html

Japan's nuclear regulator has decided further details of its guidelines for local residents in case of a nuclear plant accident.

In February the Nuclear Regulation Authority decided on a revised version of the guidelines. The review came after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant accident in March, 2011.

The new guidelines expanded the necessary evacuation area, or the area where residents must stay indoors, to a 30-kilometer radius around a nuclear plant.

It also says iodine tablets should be distributed to households within 5 kilometers of a plant in advance of a possible accident.

Iodine helps prevent the thyroid gland from absorbing radioactive substances.

On Wednesday an NRA meeting decided that municipalities within 5 kilometers of a plant will have doctors inform residents about the use and storage of iodine tablets before distributing them.

It also decided that the municipalities will identify residents who may suffer from the side effects from the tablets before distribution.

Municipalities outside the 5-kilometer radius will be ordered to store necessary amounts of the tablets for emergency.

However, municipalities can distribute the tablets to residents outside the 5-kilometer radius if quick distribution would be difficult due to geography.

Concerning monitoring radiation levels, the regulator decided that the central government, instead of relevant municipalities, will be in charge. The government will set up a monitoring center near each plant and instruct municipalities and the plant operator to gather data to be used for the government to analyze.

Municipalities within 30 kilometers of a plant must now incorporate the latest decision into their disaster preparedness programs.

Joint junior-senior schools in Fukushima

Joint junior-senior high schools planned in nuclear crisis zone to attract kids

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130605p2a00m0na019000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- An "education recovery" committee from Fukushima Prefecture's Futaba District, host to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, unanimously agreed on May 4 to create a joint junior-senior high school for students from the area.

Reconstituting district schools as they were before the nuclear crisis evacuation appears extremely difficult, as local area students have now been living scattered across Fukushima Prefecture and Japan for more than two years.

In response, in December last year the committee -- made up of the municipal board of education chiefs for the eight towns and villages in Futaba District, representatives from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and the prefectural board of education -- began to consider consolidating schools. The committee's efforts are also driven by the knowledge that, if the students don't return, the district's municipalities could eventually cease to exist.

The towns and villages have reopened primary and junior high schools in areas outside the district, often in communities where their residents are now living. They have also opened five prefectural high schools, including branch schools, to service their evacuees. However, as of April this year total enrollment stood at 1,142 students, down from the 7,943 children registered at district schools before the March 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster.

The committee agreed unanimously that "it would be hard for individual municipalities to rebuild their education systems on their own," and settled on the combined junior-senior high school as a way to make returning to the district more attractive to students.

The committee, which met behind closed doors, also plans to create a "hometown" subject to help educate a future workforce for the area.

Details of the plan, including where the school will be built and who will run it, however, remained unresolved and will be addressed concretely at the committee's next meeting later in June. The members also failed to set out a specific vision for reorganizing high schools.

A proposal to build the new school in the neighboring city of Iwaki -- where many of the district's nuclear crisis refugees are currently living -- was tabled but also not passed after some municipalities where children are already back in class complained the move would impact their schools.

Meanwhile, nuclear crisis refugees themselves have expressed doubts about the establishment of a new junior-senior high school, with some residents saying their children "are already used to the local school" where they've evacuated, and that "even if there were a combined junior-senior high school, it could be impossible to get to them" if they're far away.

Three-year limit could be a problem for evacuees

June 6, 2013

Fukushima evacuees could lose right to seek damages from TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306060062>

By SHINICHI SEKINE/ Staff Writer

Time is running out for the more than 10,000 evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster to seek damage compensation from plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co.

They could lose their right to seek certain damages when the three-year statute of limitations, prescribed in the Civil Code, begins to run out next year.

During the early stages of the nuclear disaster triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, 165,824 forced evacuees received temporary payments from TEPCO, typically 1 million yen (\$10,000) per household. However, 11,214 of them had yet to file formal compensation claims as of the end of May, according to material presented by TEPCO to Hiroyuki Arai, secretary-general of the New Renaissance Party and an Upper House member from Fukushima Prefecture.

Some residents and local governments have complained that they don't understand how to file their claims because the forms are too complicated. Other residents have said that they wrongly believed the temporary payments were all that they would be able to receive.

TEPCO began accepting compensation claims in September 2011 for emotional stress incurred between March and August 2011. In December 2011, it began accepting claims for emotional stress incurred between September and November 2011.

TEPCO has said it will calculate the three-year period from the start of legal procedures for each of those groups of claims. That means the statute of limitations will begin to run out in September 2014 in the earliest cases.

Though TEPCO officials have said the utility is not considering applying the statute of limitations immediately upon its expiry, Arai expressed skepticism.

"TEPCO has taken no positive actions for encouraging people to file claims," he said. "It probably wants to minimize the amount of compensation. Administrative bodies should turn to those who have yet to file claims and directly ask them if they wish to do so."

Those who began the claims process but abandoned it halfway through after failing to reach an agreement with TEPCO could also face an expiry of the statute of limitations.

In May, the Diet passed a special exemption law to suspend the statute of limitations if a claimant has asked the government's Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center for a mediation. The law allows the claimant to file a lawsuit within a one-month period following the expiry of the statute of limitations if the mediation fails.

But many of those who have yet to file claims with TEPCO have not contacted the dispute resolution center, making them ineligible for relief under the special exemption law. No moves for further legal amendments are yet in sight, although committees in both chambers of the Diet have adopted a supplementary resolution calling for "necessary steps, including discussions on legal measures."

The sad story of Hisachi Tarukawa -TEPCO doesn't really feel responsible

June 6, 2013

Family blasts TEPCO's refusal to apologize for Fukushima farmer's suicide

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306060076>

By RYUJIRO KOMATSU/ Staff Writer

Family members of a farmer who killed himself after the Fukushima nuclear disaster lashed out at Tokyo Electric Power Co. on June 5 for refusing to apologize for his death.

The family of farmer Hisashi Tarukawa and TEPCO, operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, are expected to reach an agreement over compensation to the surviving family members. But they are also demanding that TEPCO change its attitude.

"I want TEPCO to come to my house and offer incense sticks before the tablet of my deceased father," said Kazuya Tarukawa, 37, who has taken over his father's vegetable farm.

Kazuya, the second-oldest son, could barely suppress his anger when he said quietly, "Even if we reached a settlement, my heart won't be happy without it (TEPCO's visit)."

Hisashi Tarukawa operated an organic farm in Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture. But after the meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, the government imposed restrictions on the intake of vegetables grown in the prefecture on March 23.

Hisashi, 64, hanged himself the next morning.

The family contacted the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center, which was set up by the government, to seek compensation from TEPCO.

According to sources close to the family, the center suggested a settlement offer in April this year, and TEPCO expressed its willingness to provide that amount in May.

It was the first time for TEPCO to accept a claim from a bereaved family over a suicide related to the nuclear disaster. The compensation amount is expected to exceed 10 million yen (\$100,000).

However, **the family's request for an apology from TEPCO was denied.**

"We would like to convey our feelings by making compensation as soon as possible, and we hope you'll forgive us for not being able to respond to your request directly," the company wrote in a letter sent to the family in May.

Izutaro Managi, a lawyer representing the family, criticized TEPCO's response.

"It does not sincerely feel any responsibility," Managi said at the news conference.

A judge with experience in civil cases said many parties are reluctant to express apologies in written form, even if they have reached a settlement in trials, because they do not want to leave any record of admitting their guilt.

"TEPCO might also feel that there would be no end to making apologies to individuals," the judge said.

By June 4, the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center had helped settle 2,880 compensation cases.

"We decline to comment because this is an individual case," a TEPCO public relations official said.

Radiation levels still high but driving restrictions eased

June 11, 2013

Restrictions to ease on Fukushima roads

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130611_27.html

Authorities will ease traffic restrictions on 2 main routes in a zone designated uninhabitable near the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The changes will take effect from Monday next week.

Since the disaster, the government has listed areas with radiation levels of over 50 millisieverts per year as uninhabitable.

Parts of the No.6 and No.288 national highways have been restricted to only vehicles engaged in decontamination and reconstruction efforts.

The government decided to ease the restrictions to reduce the burden on locals, who have had to make detours to avoid the highways.

From next Monday, people will become able to use the roads if they are traveling to their workplace or to hospitals. They will still need to apply in advance to the local government for permission.

To control the zone, authorities are placing barricades at 312 locations, including crossings and entrances to residential areas.

TEPCO sued by relatives of dead patients

June 12, 2013

Suit over patient deaths

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/12/national/suit-over-patient-deaths/#.UbdDwNhBpg4>

A damages suit has been filed against Tokyo Electric Power Co. by 15 relatives of four patients who died in 2011 in the early days of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdown catastrophe due to alleged improper medical care blamed on chaotic evacuations and power outages.

The 15 plaintiffs are seeking some ¥125 million in damages from Tepco in their suit filed Monday with the Tokyo District Court, **saying the patients died because they were not able to be treated during the evacuation process, which caused them to lose strength.**

The four patients who died, ranging in age from their 60s to 90s, were staying at Futaba Hospital or its affiliated nursing facility in the town of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, and died between March 15 and April 18, 2011, according to a lawyer for the plaintiffs. The central government has acknowledged that the four deaths were nuclear disaster-related.

The relatives of three other patients who died at the hospital also plan to sue Tepco.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, 51 people at Futaba Hospital and its nursing facility, including inpatients, died between March 11, 2011, the day of nuclear crisis started, and April 30, 2011.

“I hope the lawsuit will reveal how a member of my family died,” one of the plaintiffs said.

Tepco declined comment on the suit, saying it has yet to examine the details.

Families of deceased hospital patients sue TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130610_35.html

The families of hospital patients who died in the confusion of the evacuation from the Fukushima nuclear plant accident have filed a joint lawsuit against the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

The lawsuit is being brought by the families of 4 people who were in Futaba Hospital and an adjacent nursing home in Okuma town at the time of the accident. The facilities are about 4 kilometers from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, and within the evacuation zone.

The plaintiffs say their loved ones died because they were stranded in the facilities without necessary medical and nursing services or had to endure a long bus trip to evacuate.

They are demanding about 300,000 dollars each in damages.

The lawyers representing the plaintiffs say that the purpose of the suit is not to get money but to find out why their loved ones lost their lives.

TEPCO officials have declined to comment on the case.

The government says about 230 people were stranded in medical facilities and that 50 of them died during and after evacuation.

TEPCO employees' lost claims

June 15, 2013

Tepco employee loses info on 22 claiming nuclear compensation redress

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/15/national/tepcO-employee-loses-info-on-22-claiming-nuclear-compensation-redress/#.UbwGdthBpg4>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Friday that one of its employees has lost documents that include the personal information of 22 individuals who have applied for compensation related to the triple-meltdown crisis at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, adding that this was not the first case of mishandling.

“We deeply apologize for causing trouble,” a Tepco official told reporters, explaining that the employee, a man in his 40s, left the documents on a train when returning home Tuesday. The utility has not received reports of any inappropriate use of the personal information.

Tepco revealed that there have been around 60 cases involving the mishandling of personal information related to compensation claims and it had decided to disclose the latest case because it has not been able to contact all of the 22 individuals involved.

The individuals include evacuees from the town of Futaba, where the Fukushima plant is located.

According to Tepco officials, the documents included the individuals’ names and addresses, and the details of their compensation claims. The employee noticed Wednesday morning that he had left his bag containing the documents on the train the previous day.

Tepco reported the incident to police, but the documents have not been found.

Officials back in Iwaki - Come back, good people

June 17, 2013

End of nuclear exile in Saitama boon for evacuees

Futaba brings offices back to Fukushima

Kyodo, JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/17/national/futaba-brings-offices-back-to-fukushima/#.Ub8VKthBpg4>

FUKUSHIMA – Officials from the evacuated town of Futaba moved its headquarters back to Fukushima Prefecture on Monday, ending a temporary stay in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, caused by the 2011 nuclear crisis.

The new office — the town’s fourth since the catastrophe — is in the city of Iwaki.

According to the Futaba town office, 3,782 of its evacuees are living in Fukushima and 3,132 in other prefectures. About 110 are still stuck in a shelter set up at a former high school building in Kazo.

Of the town’s 89 employees, 67 will work out of the Iwaki office and 11 others will remain in Kazo. The office also has a branch in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture.

In the wake of the nuclear disaster, the town office was moved to Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, then to Saitama Super Arena in the city of Saitama and then to Kazo.

On May 28, the town, the last no-go zone, was reorganized into radiation zones termed as difficult for residents to return to but where preparations can be made for the lifting of evacuation orders.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa said, “the town has at last returned to Fukushima Prefecture.” **The move will make it easier for officials to work on reconstruction by strengthening cooperation with the prefectural government,** he said.

“The closer town office makes it easier to lodge requests,” said Soichi Saito, 63, a Futaba evacuee now living in temporary housing in Iwaki.

In its reconstruction plan, Futaba proposes to establish “**provisional towns**” in the three Fukushima cities of Iwaki, Koriyama and Minamisoma by building public housing, halls and parks for the evacuees.

The town is set to start full-scale talks with the three cities about ways to achieve this proposal.

To meet its goal of allowing residents to start moving into the public housing in 2016, the town has to make efforts to select construction sites, establish ways to provide medical and welfare services and secure employment. Building schools and devising measures to assist long-term evacuees are also urgent tasks.

However, a survey conducted by the town in December and January showed that about 30 percent of Futaba’s citizens don’t wish to return.

The people who said they are willing to move or will consider moving to the “provisional towns” accounted for slightly more than 50 percent, and some hoped to settle in the places where they were evacuated, according to the survey.

Allow Fukushima children to play in sand again

June 23, 2013

Kyushu kindergartens help Fukushima children play in the sand again

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201306230055>

By TOSHIHIKO NINOMIYA/ Staff Writer

YUKUHASHI, Fukuoka Prefecture—More than 100 kindergartens and nursery centers are joining hands to send tons of sand to Fukushima so that children can frolic in their beloved sandboxes again without radiation concerns.

At Kirakiraboshi Kindergarten in Yukuhashi, 50 children and their parents loaded a ton of sand into bags with scoops on June 22.

The kindergarteners also wrote messages and drew pictures to encourage Fukushima children.

“I want you to play together nicely,” said 3-year-old Himari Harada.

The kindergarten bought the sand to take part in a project organized by Pro-ho, a nonprofit organization based in Kita-Kyushu, which provides training to child-care workers.

Mariko Yamada, director of Pro-ho, launched the effort in May after receiving a letter from a kindergarten teacher in Fukushima who underwent training at the NPO last autumn.

Chiharu Ito, 41, wrote that Fukushima children were allowed to play outdoors from this spring, two years after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

While children love to frolic in the sandbox, Ito said kindergartens have to buy fresh sand because radioactive materials that spread from the crippled plant cannot be removed.

Yamada had heard from Ito during her training that children cannot play in the existing sand due to radiation concerns.

She has secured 6 tons of sand after asking for support from those who received training at Pro-ho and other people.

A total of 9 tons of sand is expected to leave a depot in Iizuka, Fukuoka Prefecture, where Yamada lives, on June 29, to be delivered to four kindergartens in Fukushima.

"I am happy because my wish is coming true, thanks to everyone's goodwill," Ito said. "I want to let children play in the sand as soon as possible."

Many of the kindergartens and nursery centers participating in the project are in Kyushu.

Pro-ho also plans to send sand to kindergartens outside Fukushima, which have asked for help.

Additional Gov't money for compensation

June 25, 2013

Govt. approves more funds for TEPCO compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130625_43.html

The Japanese government has approved additional assistance of more than 660 billion yen, or about 6.6 billion dollars, for compensation stemming from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, and the government-funded Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund asked the government to provide the additional funds. The utility's officials say the compensation costs are higher than expected as confirmation of the damage proceeds.

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi told TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Tuesday that the government had approved the request.

Motegi said he hopes the utility will make fine-tuned responses in handling compensation and reconstruction support for Fukushima by listening to the opinions of affected residents and strengthening cooperation with the government's policies.

The additional funds bring the total amount of taxpayers' money provided to TEPCO to about 38-billion dollars. This sum is expected to increase when the demands for the cost of decontamination start to rise.

Hirose told reporters that his firm will pay compensation to help promote local economic revitalization. He said TEPCO will work closely with local and national governments.

Future effects of radiation don't count

June 27, 2013

TEPCO rejects compensation settlement for radiation anxiety

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306270078>

By RYUJIRO KOMATSU/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. on June 26 rejected a compensation proposal by a state arbitration body on grounds there is insufficient scientific evidence to support health anxieties by claimants about the future effects of radiation exposure, lawyers said.

The settlement was proposed by the government-affiliated nuclear damage compensation dispute resolution center at the request of 190 residents of the Nagadoro district of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture. Nagadoro lies beyond the 30-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant where reactor meltdowns occurred following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The government dragged its heels in issuing an evacuation order for the district, and as a result, many residents were exposed to radioactive materials released from the plant.

The residents have sought compensation for anxiety about health from radiation exposure in the future. The proposed settlement calls on TEPCO, the plant operator, to pay 500,000 yen (\$5,010) per resident and an additional 500,000 yen to those 18 years old or under as well as pregnant women.

But the company refused to comply in a June 26 meeting with residents, lawyers told a news conference in Tokyo.

"The proposal is not compatible with scientific knowledge about radiation exposure and their effects on health," a TEPCO official was quoted as saying. "It is difficult to admit that there was a specific violation of rights for which compensation should be paid."

TEPCO has declined to comment on ongoing cases.

Yoshitomo Shigihara, chief of the Nagadoro district, criticized TEPCO.

"Children in the district will have to live with anxiety stemming from radiation exposure for many years to come," Shigihara told the news conference. "Does TEPCO understand that?"

In a business plan it submitted to the government in April 2012, TEPCO said it will respect proposals by dispute settlement organizations. It has basically accepted settlement proposals by the nuclear damage compensation dispute resolution center.

According to lawyers, TEPCO indicated that it could have an impact beyond the Nagadoro case if it accepted the center's settlement proposal.

The statement suggests that the utility may refuse to pay compensation to 110 residents of Iitate's Warabidaira district, who have sought mediation on similar grounds.

Check your own exposure

June 29, 2013

Government offers dosimeters--not decontamination--for Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306290074>

By MIKI AOKI/ Staff Writer

After failing to reach its radiation decontamination target, the government proposed that evacuees from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster return to their homes and take responsibility for their own safety.

The residents called for continued clean-up efforts, but government officials offered them dosimeters instead.

The proposal was made on June 23 in a meeting between central government officials and evacuees from the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture.

Under the central government's policy, evacuees cannot return to their homes until decontamination work reduces radiation levels to 0.23 microsievert per hour, or 1 millisievert a year. The government said it is responsible for achieving this target.

Decontamination work in the Miyakoji district has been completed, but radiation levels in residential areas still range between 0.32 and 0.54 microsievert per hour on average, much higher than the government's goal.

According to an audio recording of the June 23 meeting obtained by The Asahi Shimbun, evacuees urged government officials to continue the decontamination work until the radiation target is met.

However, **the officials rejected their request.**

They explained that the goal of 0.23 microsievert per hour was set to prevent the accumulated radiation exposure from exceeding 1 millisievert a year among people who stay outdoors for eight hours a day.

One official said the actual radiation exposure levels will differ from individual to individual.

“We will offer you a new-type dosimeter because we want you to check your exposure to radiation by yourselves,” the official said.

The official indicated that the government plans to allow evacuees to return home by the “bon” consecutive holiday season in mid-August.

The government has spent billions of yen trying to decontaminate a number of areas around the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Workers have described the efforts as futile, and some said they have dumped radioactive debris into rivers without properly collecting and disposing of it.

“If the government has an unlimited budget, it can conduct decontamination work until the people are satisfied,” said Tomohiko Hideta, an official of the Reconstruction Agency. “In reality, however, it’s impossible to do.”

Hideta also confirmed that the government at the June 23 meeting proposed that residents check radiation exposure levels by themselves with dosimeters.

The Environment Ministry denied its officials suggested such a thing in the meeting.

But when told that audio recordings of the meeting and the words of many residents show that these proposals were indeed made, the ministry declined to provide clear answers.

TEPCO must share data of residents eligible for compensation

June 30, 2013

Municipalities ask Tepco for residents' data to expedite redress

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/30/national/municipalities-ask-tepco-for-residents-data-to-expedite-redress/#.Uc8P-NhSb9k>

NARAHARA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Tokyo Electric Power Co. may disclose information on Fukushima Prefecture residents who have yet to file compensation claims with their municipalities over the nuclear crisis.

Local governments in Fukushima have been calling on Tepco to share data about residents who are eligible to file such claims, as the right to seek damages for some of them could expire as early as September 2014.

Releasing this information is expected to assist with the early filing of compensation claims by such residents over the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Tepco Executive Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, who heads the utility's revitalization headquarters in Fukushima Prefecture, told a news conference in Naraha on Friday that the company will be flexible on the expiry of affected residents' right to claim damages.

Tepco is examining appropriate ways to share the residents' information with third parties without violating the Personal Information Protection Law, Ishizaki said.

Of the total 165,000 residents in 13 coastal municipalities in Fukushima who have filed for provisional compensation, 11,000 have yet to submit applications in full, according to Tepco.

Ishizaki said the utility will soon finish setting standards for compensation linked to contaminated farmland in the prefecture, and aims to begin processing applications by the end of August. Tepco also plans to start accepting applications related to contaminated mountainous and forested areas of Fukushima in September, he added.

What is Twitter the reflection of?

July 1, 2013

Tweets on nuclear power and quake recovery abundant, but not reflected in poll: research

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130701p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Public interest in the nuclear power issue and recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake was adamantly high over the Twittersphere among topics likely to be debated in the upcoming House of Councillors election, analysis by the Mainichi Shimbun and a Ritsumeikan University associate professor has shown.

Meanwhile, respondents to a nationwide Mainichi opinion poll rather valued social security and economic measures as crucial to their voting decisions ahead of the July 21 upper house election.

The analysis was jointly conducted by the Mainichi and Ritsumeikan's Ryosuke Nishida on June 30 as part of collaborative research on online campaigning for the upper house race. The analysis results underscored a gap between opinion poll results and Internet-based public opinion.

According to the telephone poll carried out by the Mainichi, 32 percent of respondents chose "pension, health care, nursing care and child-rearing" as issues important to their voting decisions, while 25 percent cited "economic measures."

Meanwhile on Twitter, there were 29,000 tweets about pension and child-rearing, while 23,000 tweets discussed economic conditions and the so-called "Abenomics" policies promoted by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Overall, voices on Twitter were apparently more focused on politically divided issues such as nuclear power rather than everyday-life topics.

In the joint research, 50 keywords were selected from among policy and other themes likely to be discussed during upper house election campaigning. The number of relevant tweets was then tallied by NTTCom Online Marketing Solutions Corp., using the analysis software "BuzzFinder" on June 28 and 29.

Because the parameter of the number of tweets is unclear, it is difficult to quantify tweets on certain topics with percentages. However, the number of tweets on "nuclear power" was by far the most numerous, at 90,000, followed by those on "quake-disaster and reconstruction" at 42,000 and "the Constitution and constitutional amendments" at 31,000. In contrast, only 6 percent of respondents to the Mainichi poll chose "nuclear power and energy policy" as topics important to their voting decisions, while 7 percent cited "recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake" and 6 percent "constitutional amendments."

The number of tweets about the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture climbed to 30,000 over a two-day period last week, following controversial remarks by former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama that "it can't be helped if China thinks 'Japan stole' (Okinawa and the Senkakus)." The number of tweets on the Senkakus and North Korea totaled 42,000. Meanwhile, only 6 percent of respondents to the Mainichi poll cited "foreign diplomacy and security policy" as crucial to their voting decisions.

Asked if the lifting of the ban on utilizing the Internet in election campaigning in the upper chamber race will change Japanese politics, 39 percent said yes while 54 percent answered in the negative. The Mainichi poll also showed that 44 percent of supporters of the Abe Cabinet and 32 percent of non-supporters of the current Cabinet answered in the affirmative to that question.

"The opinion poll shows that respondents put more weight on policy measures closely linked to voters' lives such as economic trends, as well as on social security policies including pension, health care, nursing care and child-rearing," said Nishida.

"In contrast, the Twittersphere is characterized by concentrations of tweets on topics that are sharply divided to the left and right, such as the nuclear power issue, security, and constitutional amendments.

This can probably be attributed to the fact that the cost for disseminating information is low -- for example, you can easily 'retweet' topics of your concern -- and I assume this is why there arise biases specific to communications via Twitter. I will keep an eye on opinion poll trends during the campaign period and explore characteristics of public opinion on the Internet."

Politicians must face reality, say Fukushima voters

July 4, 2013

Fukushima voters tell politicians to get real

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/04/national/fukushima-voters-tell-politicians-to-get-real/#.UdW8yaxSb9k>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Voters in Fukushima Prefecture, where about 150,000 people still can't return to their homes because of the nuclear crisis, urged politicians Thursday to face the reality of the catastrophe as official campaigning for the July 21 Upper House election got under way.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe apologized to voters during a speech in the city of Fukushima, saying his Liberal Democratic Party "must reflect deeply" on its past policy of promoting nuclear power without thoroughly considering reactor safety.

"Japan cannot be revived unless Fukushima recovers," Abe said.

But he made no reference to efforts to end the crisis, to restart reactors in other parts of the country or to export nuclear technology.

Yasuo Yoshida, a 46-year-old fisherman in Iwaki on the Pacific coast, said politicians should visit the areas affected by the nuclear disaster more often and listen to local people.

"Now we face a moment of truth in trying to rebuild Fukushima's fishing industry and I want politicians to ensure that the central government will take responsibility" for the revival, Yoshida said.

Fukushima fishermen have refrained from catching fish except for trial operations out of fear of radiation.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has recently suggested that groundwater collected at the Fukushima No. 1 plant be discharged into the sea to reduce the overall amount of contaminated water at the crippled facility. Tepco, however, has also revealed that groundwater samples it has taken have high levels of radiation.

Talks between the utility and local fishermen remain bogged down.

“Even if the groundwater is clean, discharging it into the sea would ruin our recovery efforts due to the reputation (of the area),” Yoshida said.

He said he doesn’t know whether the regional economy has recovered, since he has no work.

Keiko Fujinami, a 42-year-old housewife from Naraha, said she doesn’t expect any change after the Upper House election.

“Nobody will stick to their election pledges,” said Fujinami, who has evacuated to Iwaki with her family.

The central government has said it will start research July 12 on the district in Naraha where her house is located to check whether it would be suitable to accommodate a temporary storage facility for contaminated soil and other waste.

The government is hoping to start transporting soil and waste to a new site by January 2015, but none of the municipalities approached so far has agreed to accept such a facility.

Fujinami said the government has promised to take measures to ensure safety if the facility is built in Naraha, but she doesn’t think she would be able to return to her home if it is constructed there.

“None of the Diet members or central government officials lives here,” she said. “Those people must be thinking that it’s OK as long as the facility is located far away from Tokyo.”

See also :

Fukushima voters urge politicians to face reality of nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130704p2g00m0dm079000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Voters in Fukushima Prefecture, where about 150,000 people are still living as evacuees from their homes due to the nuclear disaster triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, urged politicians to face the reality of the crisis as official campaigning for the July 21 House of Councillors election got under way Thursday. [...]

Elderly evacuees want to stay together

July 1, 2013

Last elderly evacuees settling in to new lives, want to keep it that way

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307010087>

By TETSUYA KASAI/ Staff Writer

KAZO, Saitama Prefecture--For more than 100 mostly elderly evacuees here, life at their shelter is anything but comfy. And yet, they are loathe to return to their "ideal" lives.

Instead, they want to spend what time is left to them in the company of their new-found friends.

In a nutshell, the sole remaining evacuation center set up after the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster has become a "second home" for many of the occupants.

The evacuees here are from the town of Futaba, which lies within a stone's throw of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

In the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, some 2,000 temporary shelters were set up across Japan.

But all except one, in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, have been closed as temporary housing was developed. Even after the town office moved back to Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on June 17, 109 evacuees from Futaba are still living in a building of a former prefectural high school in Kazo.

Hideko Hayashi, 81, rises at 5 a.m. daily in a lecture room on the second floor of the school gym.

Her "home" is a 17-square-meter space. A thin partition of corrugated cardboard standing 1 meter high separates her from her neighbor. Hayashi created a simple chest of drawers and a shoe box using cardboard.

Evacuees share the school restrooms and a makeshift bathroom.

"If you think inconvenience is nothing special, lives here are pleasant," said Hayashi. "To dream of an ideal life only causes pain to me."

A woman in her 70s occupies another space beyond the cardboard partition. Until last year, the lecture room was divided into four and three men were also living there.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, pays a monthly sum of 120,000 yen (\$1,208) in consolation, which, along with a modest state pension, allows Hayashi to get by.

Although Hayashi does not need to pay rent or utility bills, the cost of meals comes out of her own pocket. She usually stocks up at a local supermarket or buys food items at a nearby convenience store while out walking.

Because gas is not supplied, Hayashi uses induction heating to cook vegetables and other ingredients. More than 1,000 volunteers are pitching in to support the lives of the evacuees.

For example, working with volunteers, a 67-year-old woman opened a small restaurant near the school last autumn to provide relatively inexpensive meals to the evacuees.

According to the Futaba town government, most of the evacuees are over 50 and were forced by the nuclear disaster to live away from their families. The average age of the evacuees is 68.

Though some of them have jobs and are working, 30 people there require nursing care.

A survey in May by the town government showed that of all 113 respondents, 86 former residents of Futaba have no place to live other than the shelter.

Until the disaster, Hayashi lived alone in a detached house near the sea, and grew flowers and vegetables on her property. Her husband died 10 years ago.

Immediately after the nuclear disaster, Hayashi moved to Kanagawa Prefecture and stayed with relatives. But at the advice of a public health nurse, she moved to the evacuation shelter in January 2012.

Because of high radiation levels around her home, located less than 1 kilometer from the plant, Hayashi is barred from returning until at least four years from now.

The rented apartment in Fukushima Prefecture occupied by her eldest son and his wife is too small. This means Hayashi has to live alone.

The eldest son advised her to move to a vacant temporary dwelling in the prefecture, but she rejected the idea on grounds no family members live nearby.

"I do not want to live in solitude," said Hayashi at the time.

The school in Kazo has become her second home. The local rustic landscape is similar to that of her hometown, she added.

Hayashi hopes she will stay in the city with those she has befriended there, after the shelter is inevitably closed. To date, Hayashi and her friends have not found an alternative place to live together after they are forced to leave the school premises.

Twenty-five town officials, including a public health nurse, work in the evacuation shelter.

"Things are being done back to front," said Shinichi Ikuta, the 65-year-old head of the residents' association. "The town is doing things the wrong way round to force the evacuees out of here even though they have nowhere else to live."

The town government seems to be in no rush to close the shelter for precisely the reason cited by Ikuta.

"It is difficult to tell the evacuees that they have to leave the shelter," said Futaba's mayor, Shiro Izawa.

The mayor of Kazo, Ryoichi Ohashi, said maximum efforts will be made to allow the evacuees to continue to live in his city.

"It is us who have benefited from nuclear plants," said Ohashi, 66. "To my way of thinking, we have to support the evacuees until they regain smiles on their faces again."

The city government placed tatami mats on the floor of the school to give the space a more homey feeling. It also sought the advice of the Japan Medical Association to prevent infectious diseases.

It intends to accord them with the same level of respect due any citizen with regard to public welfare and opportunities for self-improvement.

Ohashi has also called on the central government to implement steps that will allow the evacuees to return to pick up the threads of their lives as soon as possible.

"The school is not housing," said Ohashi. "I hope the central government will consider its responsibility and offer places that will allow the evacuees to have a relaxing existence as soon as possible."

The Saitama prefectural government is also weighing whether to prepare rented apartments and other accommodation for the evacuees near Kazo.

Fukushima fishermen and abalone

July 2, 2013

Juvenile abalone released in hopes of future Fukushima fishing

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307020048>

By TAKEMICHI NISHIBORI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Fishermen here, in an effort to have their livelihoods restored, released juvenile abalone into the sea on July 1. It was the first time to do so since the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster just over two years ago.

"It is necessary in order to resume fishing operations in the future," said one of the fishermen. "It is a major step (toward the resumption of operations)."

Near a rocky beach at the Onahama-shimokajiro district of Iwaki, fishermen aboard a small fishing boat went out to where the sea was a depth of 2 to 3 meters and released 10,000 juvenile abalone, each about 3 centimeters in diameter.

Abalone catches along the coast of the city of Iwaki totaled 24 tons at a value of 185 million yen (\$1.86 million) in 2010, accounting for almost all abalone catches in Fukushima Prefecture.

But radioactive substances released from the crippled plant, where meltdowns occurred in three reactors, have been forcing local fishermen to voluntarily refrain from fishing operations.

This year, fishermen in the city have once again shelved planned trial fishing of abalone, as well as sea urchin fishing.

Agood start for saury season

July 9, 2013

Season's first saury catch unloaded in Hokkaido

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130709_26.html

Fishing boats returned to ports in Hokkaido, northern Japan, on Tuesday, with big hauls of the season's first Pacific saury or sanma fish.

The fishing season for small boats opened on Monday. **The number of boats that went fishing that day**

was the smallest in 3 years, due to soaring fuel prices.

But at a port in Kushiro City, 5.2 tons of saury were unloaded on Tuesday-- far more than the first haul last year at 0.8 tons.

Fishermen said they found a large school of saury east of the local coasts. One of the fishermen said they made **a good start this season**, and that they hope to end the season in the black, even though fuel costs are high and the fishing grounds are distant.

The saury fetched as much as 66 dollars per kilogram at an auction. That's about 40 percent higher than the price fetched at the first auction last year.

The saury were then sold at a local market for about 5 dollars per fish.

Saury fishing by medium-to-large boats will begin next month.

Both the reactors and the surrounding areas should be taken into account

July 10, 2013

58 municipalities near nuclear plants could have isolated areas in event of disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130710p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Fifty-eight municipalities in Japan that lie within a 30 kilometer radius of a nuclear power plant house settlements that could become isolated in the event of a combined earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, a Mainichi survey has found.

New standards introduced by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) to check the safety of nuclear power plants before they are restarted requires nuclear facilities to prepare themselves for a severe accident. But there are no stipulations on disaster countermeasures for surrounding areas, including communities that could become cut off in the event of a disaster. Experts warn that in restarting reactors, it is essential for the government to include surrounding areas in its safety evaluations.

Under the Basic Law on Disaster Control Measures, the 136 cities, towns and villages located within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant -- spanning 21 prefectures -- are required to compile disaster prevention plans to prepare for a nuclear accident. A major challenge for some municipalities has been the formulation of plans for communities whose evacuation routes would be limited in the event of a nuclear disaster and which could become cut off due to disaster damage, leaving residents with nowhere to turn.

The Mainichi polled disaster management officials in 123 municipalities spread out over 20 prefectures excluding Fukushima. The detached settlements that officials in 58 municipalities said could become isolated are located mainly in the mountains and on peninsulas. A number of municipalities have

incorporated plans to evacuate residents using Self-Defense Force helicopters, Japan Coast Guard vessels, or fishing boats, while others are considering such plans. Yet officials still harbor concerns.

"The transportation capacity of helicopters and boats is limited, and I wonder if we could actually use them if it came down to it," one official in the Hokkaido town of Shakotan said.

Another official in Ayabe, Kyoto Prefecture, commented, "Thinking about the geographical conditions and the cost involved, road maintenance is unrealistic, and we can only make preparations within our capacity."

Meanwhile, a representative from the Ehime Prefecture city of Ozu commented, "In a worst-case scenario, we would have no option but to have residents wait it out indoors."

The International Atomic Energy Agency specifies five levels of safeguards for nuclear power plants, and emphasizes not only measures to counter a serious accident, but disaster prevention measures for surrounding areas. The NRA's new standards legally require safeguards against earthquakes, tsunamis, and serious accidents like the one that struck Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. If a power company applies to restart a nuclear reactor, the authority will screen the application to determine whether safety measures meet its standards. However, the authority maintains that evacuation plans for surrounding areas are the responsibility of municipal governments, and that it is difficult to determine whether the government has adopted sufficient countermeasures.

Hitoshi Yoshioka, a Kyushu University professor who served as a member of the government's investigation committee on the Fukushima disaster, commented, "**You can only call a plan safe after having taken measures for both the nuclear facility and the surrounding area.** The system should be reformed so that the NRA can take the initiative and confirm and verify safety, covering surrounding areas

Anything normal in Fukushima?

July 16, 2013

PHOTO: In Fukushima, beach-lovers starting to enjoy a normal summer again

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201307160066>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Youngsters were jumping for joy with the July 15 reopening of Yotsukura beach here, closed these past two-plus years due to the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., closed all beaches in Fukushima.

Yotsukura is the second local beach to reopen following Nakoso beach that city authorities deemed was safe last summer.

Families and young people flocked to the beach on opening day.

According to an official of Fukushima Prefecture, no radioactive materials were found in the surrounding seawater during a check on July 3.

Eri Komatsu, 16, a second-year student at senior high school, visited the beach with three of her mates from her volleyball club during their junior high school days.

Komatsu moved here from Hirono which is close to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. She said, "I cannot swim at the beach in my hometown." She added that she hoped to be back there soon.

Who is interested in what

Most Mainichi site users interested in Constitution reform, nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130716p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Most users of a Mainichi Shimbun site that shows how far their political ideas match the policies of political parties as well as individual candidates in the July 21 House of Councillors election are particularly interested in constitutional amendments and nuclear power.

The "Eravote" site shows how close readers' political ideas are to political parties and candidates' policies if they answer questions on 26 policy issues, including constitutional amendments, nuclear power, the consumption tax hike, Japan's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade pact and the death penalty.

Of 62,834 readers who used the site between July 1 and the morning of July 15, 31 percent responded that they are highly interested in constitutional revisions and another 16 percent said they are relatively interested in the issue.

Over 40 percent said they are highly or relatively interested in the issue of whether nuclear power stations are necessary.

However, less than 40 percent replied that they are interested in the consumption tax increase and Abenomics, or economic policies promoted by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Less than 30 percent responded they are interested in the pension issue.

In the meantime, a Mainichi Shimbun opinion poll conducted on July 13 and 14 shows members of the public are most interested in issues that are closely related to their livelihoods, with 29 percent citing pension, medical and nursing care and childrearing matters and 26 percent picking economic stimulus measures. In contrast, only 8 percent and 6 percent of the respondents selected the energy policy that includes nuclear power and constitutional revisions, respectively, as the issue that they attach the most importance to in the upper house poll.

The results suggest that those who use the Eravote site are particularly interested in politics and tend to pay close attention to nuclear power, constitutional revisions and other issues over which political parties are in conflict with each other, although the results of the poll and the survey on Eravote users should not be simply compared.

Analysis of Twitter messages on the election show that Twitter users are paying particular attention to nuclear power and are relatively interested in constitutional amendments.

Therefore, it can be said that those who are actively using the Internet tend to be interested in nuclear power and revisions to the supreme law.

For the vast majority, Fukushima still not under control

Survey: Most Japanese think Fukushima nuclear accident not settled

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307180064>

By SHIGEKO SEGAWA / Staff Writer

The vast majority of Japanese, 94 percent, think the nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the earthquake and tsunami two years ago has not been put under control, a survey showed.

A research team led by Hirotsada Hirose, a professor emeritus of Tokyo Woman's Christian University, sent out questionnaires in March to 1,200 people across the nation ranging in age from 15 to 79.

According to the survey, 94 percent said that they thought the nuclear accident had not been settled. When asked for reasons, many responded that radioactive substances were still leaking from the stricken plant.

As far as who the respondents said they trust, 33 percent said disaster information disseminated from the central government and its ministries and agencies was the most untrustworthy, while 2 percent chose local governments as the most unreliable source of disaster information.

"An (effective) nuclear policy is impossible unless the central government wins the understanding and support of not only local residents living in areas that host nuclear power plants but also the support of all the people in Japan," Hirose said.

Twenty-three percent of respondents said they believe it is only a matter of time before another accident will occur if nuclear plant operators resume operations at now-idle reactors, while 57 percent said they think a similar nuclear disaster will likely happen

Thirty-one percent said nuclear power should be abandoned as soon as possible, whereas 54 percent said Japan should phase out nuclear power over time.

The research team presented the findings to a meeting of the Cabinet Office's Atomic Energy Commission on July 17.

Summer fun for Fukushima children too

July 21, 2013

Fukushima children frolic in play fountain built in decontaminated park

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201307210008

By TATSUYA SASAKI/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Summer fun is back for some of the children of Fukushima Prefecture struggling for a return to normalcy after the 2011 nuclear disaster: They now have a new play fountain.

The new water attraction made a big splash with the children of Minami-Soma on July 20, the first day of summer vacation. It was built in a decontaminated park so children could play without the fear of radiation exposure.

The fountain was built by a local civics group that goes by the name Minna Kyowakoku (Everybody's republic). The artificial pond measures 17 meters in diameter and is about 15 centimeters deep.

Minna Kyowakoku, which started a fund-raising campaign for the project in May, received donations totaling about 12 million yen (\$120,000) through the Internet and other venues from more than 500 individuals and organizations across the nation.

Until it was cleared last year, the south of the city used to lie within the 20-kilometer no-entry zone following the accident in March 2011 at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

July 19, 2013

Fukushima evacuee children begin summer holidays

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130719_37.html

Children who were forced to flee their hometown following the nuclear accident in March 2011 in northeastern Japan are marking the start of their 3rd summer holiday since the disaster.

Okuma Town is one of the affected municipalities. It hosts the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture. Students at the town's 2 public elementary schools now study in Aizu Wakamatsu City, some 100 kilometers away.

The schools held a joint ceremony on Friday to mark the end of first school term. The students saw photos of events held during the term, including a Japanese music concert staged to encourage them. One

of the schools' principals told the children that they should never forget to feel gratitude for the support they are receiving.

The 2 schools now have a total of around 160 students -- down about 75 percent from before the disaster.

Many students have moved to different schools due to their parents' employment or other circumstances. More are expected to change schools during the summer holidays.

A girl who will relocate to another city in Fukushima prefecture said she will miss her friends, but hopes to make many new ones at her next school.

Agreement on compensation

July 24, 2013

TEPCO, bereaved families agree on compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130724_34.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company, the operator of the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, and the families of victims of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami have agreed on compensation.

Under the government-mediated scheme, TEPCO will pay a maximum of about 6,000 dollars to family members of 173 victims in Namie Village near the nuclear plant.

The families originally demanded that the utility pay some 110,000 dollars per victim in compensation. They argued that they suffered trauma as the nuclear accident made their search and rescue operations impossible for more than a month.

Morihisa Kanouya, who lost his wife, is the leader of the bereaved families.

He says he and other group members felt they had no choice but to accept the settlement. He says this will not end their pain.

Jul. 24, 2013 - Updated 12:10 UTC

Fukushima horse festival

Traditional horse festival begins in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130727_15.html

Around 50 men dressed as samurai warriors rode on horseback through the streets of a town in Fukushima Prefecture on Saturday to open a festival that boasts a 1,000-year history.

The 3-day event is taking place near the ruins of a castle in the Soma region. Participants re-enact a ceremony held before battle in ancient times.

Similar ceremonies take place throughout the area each summer. The Japanese government has designated the festival an important intangible folk cultural asset.

Kiyotane Soma, a son of the 33rd head of the Soma family, led a team of around 50 men.

He told them to pray for the area's recovery from the 2011 disaster.

He then ordered them to advance to the site where they will re-enact a battle on Sunday.

The blast of conch shells signaled the start of their parade through the city.

An elementary school pupil from Miyagi Prefecture said she was impressed by the men and their horses. She said she is worried about the nearby Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant but wants to come to see the festival every year as her grandmother lives in Soma City.

Locals staged a smaller version of the festival in 2011, the year of the disaster. But the event returned to its normal size last year.

"Fukushima" by Mark Willacy

Incredible stories that should not be forgotten

by Anthony Fensom

Special To The Japan Times

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2013/07/27/books/incredible-stories-that-should-not-be-forgotten/#.UfP7MaxSb9k>

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA – Foreign journalists charged with covering Japan's devastating March 2011 disasters faced an enormous challenge: sensitively expressing the human tragedy while accurately assessing the vast amount of real-time data on the crisis.

Some failed, as seen by the wildly inaccurate reports broadcast in certain overseas media, including a supposed nuclear reactor in the heart of Tokyo and a "mass exodus" from the capital. But many succeeded

where the local media hesitated, particularly those journalists objective enough to draw criticism from both sides of the nuclear debate.

One such journalist was Tokyo-based Australian Mark Willacy, who was in the right place at the right time for a newsman when the disaster struck. However, in an interview to discuss his new book on the crisis, “Fukushima,” the experienced correspondent for Australia’s ABC said it was not always easy keeping emotions in check.

“In the early days of the disaster, I was covering the tsunami exclusively and my colleague Hayden Cooper was flown into Tokyo to handle the nuclear crisis. I just thought the tsunami disaster was massive, the biggest story in the world, and you lose track that there’s this other drama developing,” he said.

“It’s very hard as you’re hearing these terrible stories, and it can be damaging for journalists to cover tragedies like this. Having covered the Iraq War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for four years, I still get affected, but hopefully I’ve got more of an idea about the wider context.”

“Fukushima” adds to the burgeoning library of works on the crisis but, unlike many others, obtains views from all the main protagonists — from tsunami survivors and nuclear plant workers to former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, along with Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco), whom Willacy said needed considerable persuasion to become involved.

Willacy takes advantage of his storytelling experience as a television journalist to portray the crisis, maintaining a lively pace while zooming in like a camera close-up on key personalities. The result is an engaging work that draws readers in rather than shutting them out, portraying the flawed policies and people behind the “man-made” nuclear disaster without sermonizing.

“There’s this view that you’re either pro- or anti-nuclear in covering this disaster, and I’m not either. My reporting is about exposing official corporate and regulatory failings,” he said.

“The government ignored repeated warnings from their own panel members, their own seismologists and their own committees. I find it horribly ironic that Tepco of all people had the closest, most accurate simulation of anyone — their 15.7-meter tsunami wave forecast was the closest anyone got to what actually happened on March 11 [at the Fukushima No. 1 plant].”

The book’s full title promises the “inside story” and Willacy does not shirk from questioning the key players. The villains of Japan’s biggest postwar disaster are clearly identified, including the collusive “nuclear village” of power companies, politicians and bureaucrats, aided by a compliant media.

While fewer in number, the heroes include the stricken nuclear plant's manager, the "Fukushima 50" who stayed behind and the "samurai firemen" who worked to prevent an even bigger disaster, along with the individual officials, scientists, journalists and others who battled against a complacent establishment.

The tsunami left 20,000 dead or missing and thousands more homeless, and the author brings such cold data to life with some heartbreaking stories, including the school where 74 of 108 students drowned; the hospital patients killed in a rushed evacuation; the suicides among evacuees "condemned to live in exile"; Fukushima fishermen left wondering if anyone will ever buy their fish again; and parents facing the anxiety of their children's thyroid tests.

Like other works on the disaster, the author will undoubtedly face criticism from both sides of the nuclear debate for either underplaying or exaggerating the crisis. Japan won much praise internationally for its well-organized response to the tsunami and the "stoicism" of its people, a fact that the author accepts.

However, Willacy argues that Japan has much to learn from the nuclear disaster, including the need for independent regulators, an end to *amakudari* jobs for bureaucrats in nuclear companies and reform of the "kisha club" media system that helped prevent scrutiny.

With the government now eyeing the restart of nuclear plants, Willacy warns that another Fukushima is possible if the lessons of the disaster are ignored. For the author, the book's main message is as clear as the stone markers found in coastal towns warning of past tsunami: Never forget.

"'Fukushima' is the story of the people who lost so much — people with incredibly brave stories to tell, but also quite tragic stories. When I interviewed them, most of them would say to me what they didn't want for the future was for people to forget this. These are incredible stories and they should be told, and hopefully not forgotten," he said.

Anthony Fensom is a freelance writer and communications consultant.

Rumors?

July 29, 2013

Yoroku: Fukushima farmers' fight against harmful rumors goes on

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130729p2a00m0na003000c.html>

"I've been growing bitter melon on my tiny balcony at my housing complex:" so I wrote at the beginning of this column around this time two years ago. While my bitter melon crop did indeed do well at that time, I went through a fiasco in this regard last year.

One morning, while I was watering my bitter melon, I noticed that some of its leaves were clearly different from those normally associated with the plant. The strange leaves were larger than the rest, and their numbers gradually increased. Eventually, they began bearing numerous large yellow flowers.

"They look like pumpkin flowers," I thought, although the round fruit of those flowers spoiled rapidly and soon dropped to the ground. After this went on for some time, I finally harvested a small crop of bitter melon -- only to find that they were tasteless. In addition, the plant's large leaves had just enough gaps to be ineffective in shading out the sun -- a complete failure in terms of creating a "green curtain" sunshade.

The cause of my setback became clear after I conducted an Internet search prior to my third attempt this year. The bitter melon seedling that I bought last year turned out to be a grafted seedling designed against replanting failure. With such a seedling, a grower is supposed to not let the rootstock shoot out buds -- elementary knowledge that had completely passed me by. What nonsense that I had been appreciating the flowers without knowing that they were those of a pumpkin rootstock!

This is only a funny anecdote though, to which I can proudly add that I've been making steady headway with my crop this year. Another story with no happy ending, however, is that of Koichi Tadano, a breeder in Fukushima Prefecture, which was carried in the Mainichi Shimbun earlier this month. While Tadano had succeeded in producing grafted cucumber seedlings using pumpkin rootstocks, the Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear disaster changed his life. Half of the bitter melon seedlings that he grew in the wake of the catastrophe remained unsold, and fetched almost giveaway prices in the market despite no apparent radiation effects.

For farmers, nothing is more frustrating than harmful rumors. No matter how many safety measures producers take, and even if crops are free of problems, consumers' image controls the situation -- leaving farmers paralyzed. It's about time to give more serious thought to how cruel this situation really is. ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

Gov't must stop procrastinating about assistance measures

July 29, 2013

EDITORIAL: Government must stop delaying assistance to nuclear disaster victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201307290071>

Further procrastination is unacceptable in easing the health concerns and rebuilding the lives of people forced to evacuate their homes after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The government's foot-dragging in responding to a law intended to assist children and disaster victims is symbolic of the whole issue.

Thirteen months have passed since the Diet passed legislation to provide assistance to nuclear accident victims. The legislation was sponsored by a nonpartisan group of lawmakers.

Nuclear disaster victims are categorized into three groups: those who continued to live in the stricken region; those who evacuated at the central government's order or at their own discretion; and evacuees who are preparing to return to their homes.

Although they were all victims of the nuclear disaster, disputes have emerged among them due to the differences in their situations.

The law sets the principles to meet the varying needs of the victims by grouping them all together as equally entitled to measures to prevent additional radiation exposure. Specific steps to help the victims are supposed to be compiled under a "basic policy" of the government.

However, the basic policy still does not exist. The government was expected to listen to the opinions of the affected people before putting together the key policy. But the Reconstruction Agency has not held even one such forum.

The existing structure of the state and municipalities is ill-designed to properly respond to the concerns and problems of the victims.

For example, people who lived outside the evacuation zone in Fukushima Prefecture have no recourse to receive medical checks that examine in detail any impact of radiation exposure.

In addition, nothing has been decided about evacuees who live in homes rented by local governments as temporary housing. Under the current arrangement, they can live there until spring 2015. But many lack the financial means to move to other places, making it extremely difficult for them to plan for the future.

Life under these conditions has heightened the stress levels of parents, resulting in an increase in child abuse cases in the affected areas.

Government officials should gather the victims' opinions to take a fresh look at assistance measures. One stumbling block in devising these measures is that the affected areas must be grouped according to radiation levels. This system cannot please everyone because the degree of health concerns and the need for evacuation varies from one individual to the next.

But this does not mean that Japan should wait further to come up with assistance measures.

Nuclear accident victims had great expectations for help after the law was enacted. But with still no assistance coming their way, they are starting to feel abandoned.

The health effects from low-level radiation exposure are also unclear. The Reconstruction Agency has asked the Nuclear Regulation Authority to consider setting up safety standards for low-level radiation.

Without public debate on the topic, however, it is impossible to come up with safety standards or measures designed to deal with low-level radiation doses that would be acceptable to a large majority of the public.

As a first step, the Reconstruction Agency should set up a forum where officials can listen to evacuees and residents to find out their specific needs. The discussion forum could also help the victims overcome their past differences.

If the affected areas are grouped according to radiation levels, constant reviews are needed to assess whether such a system is appropriate.

The Science Council of Japan has proposed the creation of a public forum where scientists of diverse opinions can debate the effects of the radiation doses. Such a venue should be utilized.

Diet members of the ruling and opposition parties worked together to draft the legislation to assist victims of the nuclear accident.

Now that the Upper House election is over, they should come together again to press the government to translate the law into tangible results.

How many will be returning?

August 2, 2013

Long-stay program starts for Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201308020071

By KUNIO OZAWA/ Staff Writer

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture—When the sun set on Aug. 1, Hisao Watanabe sat under the fluorescent lights of his living room in the Miyakoji district here and could not contain his joy.

“I don’t need to go back tonight,” said the 78-year-old farmer, who had grown accustomed to returning to a rental apartment in Tamura’s Funehiki-machi district.

Watanabe joined the government’s first long-stay program for nuclear disaster evacuees that started Aug. 1 in Miyakoji.

The district, which lies partly within a 20-kilometer radius of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, was designated a no-entry zone after the nuclear accident unfolded in March 2011. But it was reorganized as a “zone preparing for the evacuation order to be lifted” in April 2012.

The government said radioactive decontamination work in the area was completed in June, and that residents could return home for extended stays from August through October.

The returning residents must reapply for the long-stay program every month, and they can remain at their homes for a maximum of three months. The government is renting out dosimeters for residents who return, and it plans to lift the evacuation order as early as in November after consultations with the Tamura city government.

But with Tokyo Electric Power Co. still struggling with radioactive water leaks and other problems at the Fukushima plant, not everyone from Miyakoji is eager to return home.

Among the 380 residents of 121 households in the district, 112 residents of 28 households applied for long-term stays by July 31. Of them, 82 residents of 22 households returned to their homes on Aug. 1.

Most areas of the Miyakoji district still have radiation levels above the government’s long-term goal of 0.23 microsievert per hour or 1 millisievert a year, even after the decontamination work.

Watanabe, however, jumped at the opportunity to bring a sense of normalcy back to his life.

After the government decided to change the designation for the Miyakoji district, residents were allowed to visit their homes but only in the daytime. Longer-term stays were permitted for the year-end and other long holiday periods.

During the evacuation, Watanabe returned to his home every day, eager to clean up his house and work on his farm. But he always had to go back to the rental apartment in Funehiki-machi where he stayed with his wife, Misako, 72, their eldest son, Tomohiro, 52, and his wife.

Watanabe said he is now looking forward to having his grandchildren and their families visit him in Miyakoji during the mid-August Bon holidays.

“I will be able to work on the farm earlier from tomorrow,” he added.

August 1, 2013

Residents of Fukushima district allowed home, but few opt to return



Rice paddies are shown the morning of Aug. 1 in the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, where preparations are being made for shipping the rice crop this autumn. The area is the first designated evacuation zone where the government has permitted residents to return for "long-term stays" of three months.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130801p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Residents from the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, began returning home on Aug. 1 -- the first time the government has permitted the return to a designated evacuation zone following the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The residents will be allowed to remain in their homes for what the government is terming "long-term stays" of three months from August through October, with a subsequent extension of the period also possible. However, the number of residents who have decided to return is only a small percentage of the total.

The district, which is located within the 20 kilometer exclusion zone around the nuclear power plant, was one of three areas where the government designated previous evacuation zone orders to be lifted in April 2012. At the time, radiation exposure levels in Miyakoji were found to be 20 millisieverts or less per year.

Following the lifting of the orders, residents were allowed to return home and resume some of their former activities, although overnight stays were not permitted. Decontamination work on residential areas and other parts of the district was also undertaken, and was completed at the end of June this year.

Hisao and Chikako Tsuboi, a married farming couple from the Miyakoji district, left early on the morning of Aug. 1 to return home. They had been staying in a temporary housing unit in an area of Tamura city that was outside of the 20 kilometer exclusion zone.

"The drive takes 40 minutes, so we always worry about getting home before dark. It is really helpful that we are now allowed to stay overnight," commented Hisao, looking visibly relaxed.

With radiation levels around the Tsuboi's home finally lowered, the couple began returning just before the beginning of the rice planting season. They also started to cultivate cucumbers, watermelon and tomatoes. Radiation level monitoring of their vegetables showed passable levels of 5 becquerels or less per kilogram.

"Our customers in the Kanto area are waiting," Hisao added, referring to people in regions including Yokohama and Kawasaki to whom the couple has been supplying direct sales of rice and vegetables for a decade prior to the Great East Japan Earthquake. "Our clients are planning to make their first visit since the disaster, so we have to get things ready for them to be able to stay overnight," he added.

One problem that the Tsubois must contend with is the increase in wild boars that occurred after residents left the area. "They think they have the run of the place now," he said with regard to the animals, who targeted his cucumbers, lettuce and watermelon crops. "But if more people start returning, they'll have to begin behaving themselves."

Out of 119 total households in the area, however, only 28 have signed up to return under the "long-term stay" program -- and only around half of those are interested in returning for the long term.

Among residents' reasons for not returning home is their preference for remaining in the communities that they have established following the disaster. In any case, only a fraction of the total population is likely to participate in the scenario that the national and local governments are now envisioning.

"The people who really wanted to come back had begun making preparations since around last April," said Hisao dejectedly. "I doubt that many people will end up returning."

All is well...

July 30, 2013

Tourists to Fukushima Pref. rebound to 77% of pre-quake level

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130730p2g00m0bu041000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The number of tourists to Fukushima Prefecture rose 26.3 percent in 2012 from the previous year to 44.46 million, rebounding to 77.8 percent of 2010, the year before the triple disaster -- an earthquake, a tsunami and a nuclear meltdown -- struck, the prefectural government said Monday.

Tourism "steadily recovered due to restoration of tourist facilities and declining misinformation about the nuclear power plant accident," an official at the prefecture said.

The survey showed that tourists last year to the region including the Futaba district, which is home to the quake-disabled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, were still 74.1 percent fewer than 2010

The survey was conducted jointly by the prefecture and local municipalities at a total of 374 tourist spots and events, nine places more than the previous year.

Survivor: Aug.6 and March 11

August 3, 2013

Monodrama puts spotlight on man who survived A-bomb, Fukushima accident

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201308030011

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

A survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima who later became an evacuee from the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is the subject of a monodrama being performed at Haiyuza Theater in Tokyo.

Masahiro Endo had the misfortune of twice being exposed to high levels of radiation in his lifetime. Actor Hiroshi Kamiyama, 80, who has been performing one-person shows, is telling Endo's life and story on stage. The show runs through Aug. 4.

"Aug. 6 and March 11. The two never-to-be-forgotten dates have been carved into my body and my life," Endo, 87, said in an interview near his current residence in Sagami-hara, Kanagawa Prefecture.

He was evacuated from his home in the Odaka district of Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, which was designated a part of the no-entry zone after the crisis started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. Even though the evacuation rules have been relaxed, the Odaka district is still under strict entry restrictions.

Endo was born in Fukushima Prefecture. He was drafted into the Imperial Japanese Army immediately before the nation's defeat in World War II in 1945.

While fighting in China and being transported to Japan, his health suffered, and he was sent to an army hospital in Hiroshima.

At the time of the atomic bombing on Aug. 6, 1945, Endo was in the hospital, 2.5 kilometers from ground zero. In the "black rain," he wandered around the area with other survivors, whose skin was hanging from their bodies due to the effects of the nightmarish blast. At war's end, Endo returned home and became an employee at the Odaka town office (present-day Minami-Soma).

After he retired, he turned his attention to haiku and tea ceremony, his favorite pastimes.

His peaceful life took a sharp turn due to the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. He and his family--his 84-year-old wife and 58-year-old daughter--were forced to evacuate. All he had with him was his wallet, health insurance card and an atomic bomb survivor's certificate for those officially recognized as "hibakusha," under the atomic bomb victims relief law.

Director Miru Yamaguchi, a friend of Kamiyama's, discovered Endo's tragic story as a potential subject for a monodrama. She had been looking for material for the performance of a war theme at the Haiyuza.

Yamaguchi, 50, happened to find a collection of testimonies of A-bomb survivors, published 30 years ago in Minami-Soma, from her father's bookshelf. She was struck by Endo's candid writing.

He wrote about his life and his thoughts--that he has not been to Hiroshima after 1945 because he did not want to remember the horrors of the aftermath of the atomic bomb; his involvement in a campaign to attract a nuclear power plant; and the campaign in which he tried to convince landlords to support a plant, saying, "Nuclear power is a peaceful industry, unlike the atomic bomb. As a hibakusha, I understand the horrors of radioactivity. We guarantee safety."

Yamaguchi learned in June that Endo had been greatly affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident. She and Kamiyama visited Endo and interviewed him. The hibakusha accepted her request to write a script for a monodrama based on the interview.

"As I had believed that Japan would win the war, I believed that nuclear power is safe," Endo said. "I feel ashamed."

He said he will see the monodrama in Tokyo.

"I would be happy if my experience will be of any help for peace," he said.

Endo also said he would like to visit Hiroshima, to come to grips with his experience from nearly 70 years ago.

Interesting interview with nuclear engineer Naka

August 8, 2013

INTERVIEW: Former member of 'nuclear village' calls for local initiative to rebuild Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201308080008>

By TAKAFUMI YOSHIDA/ Staff Writer

In his 40 years of involvement at nuclear plants in Fukushima Prefecture, Yukiteru Naka witnessed the safety myth surrounding nuclear energy grow to levels that left him sleepless on occasion.

Everything changed after the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Naka, a former General Electric Co. engineer, is now promoting measures to reconstruct areas hardest hit by the nuclear disaster, including some radical ideas. But he says it is up to the affected communities to raise their voices and spark debate on how to rebuild.

A native of Okinawa Prefecture, Naka says he does not want Fukushima residents to feel abandoned by fellow Japanese—much as Okinawans felt.

“That is the last hope of an engineer who has lived with nuclear plants in Fukushima,” says Naka, chairman of Tohoku Enterprise Co., which provides services for Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Excerpts from his interview follow:

* * *

Q: You can hear children playing at a park through the window of your office in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.

A: (Children can play outside) because radiation levels are relatively low here. We have to let them grow up in a safe environment. My heart aches when I think about children still evacuating from home to escape radiation.

Q: Some residents have returned to municipalities in Futaba county just around the Fukushima No. 1 plant. What is their situation?

A: Only elderly people have returned. Some say they will not be able to live meaningfully if their children or grandchildren cannot visit them.

It will take a long time to decommission reactors (at the Fukushima No. 1 plant). The slow pace of government response has been unbelievable.

The former “nuclear village” may have been disbanded, but I wonder if a new nuclear village has been born.

Q: You were a member of the nuclear village, weren't you?

A: Yes, I was. I lived with nuclear power plants in Fukushima for 40 years.

I failed to safeguard the safety that had to be safeguarded at any cost, and I had our cherished hometown destroyed and caused inconvenience to the public. I feel greatly responsible for that.

Q: Why did you become a nuclear engineer?

A: I was born to a fisherman on a small island. I was in Okinawa until I was a high school student. But I had to go to Tokyo because I was involved in a student movement against the U.S. administration of Okinawa.

I got a ship engineer's license and went around the world on a freighter. A U.S. colleague, who had worked on a nuclear submarine, suggested that I worked for GE.

I studied nuclear power hard at GE. I was licensed as an operator of the boiling water reactor, the type of reactor adopted at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

I translated a GE textbook into Japanese, and it became the first textbook at TEPCO's BWR training center. I came to Fukushima Prefecture in 1973. The No. 2 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 plant was on a trial run, and preparations were being made for the construction of the No. 6 reactor.

Since then, I worked as a nuclear engineer, giving advice on reactor construction and offering systems management and maintenance services.

After seeing the world, I believed that nuclear power would be the only energy source for resource-poor Japan. I was proud of my job.

Q: Didn't you think nuclear power was dangerous?

A: I was always aware of the risks. I experienced abnormal situations several times, including those caused by GE's design flaws.

I cannot forget an incident that occurred at the No. 3 reactor at the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant at the end of 1988. An impeller in a recirculation pump broke down, and a piece of metal entered the

reactor core. After detecting abnormal vibrations of the pump and motor, I advised TEPCO to lower power output.

I was told it was impossible because it was the end of the year.

I could not sleep. I kept saying the same thing for a month. I was relieved when power generation was finally halted.

I was afraid that the fast-moving piece of metal might fracture a pipe directly connected to the reactor because it could destroy the containment vessel.

Designs of boiling water reactors allow only highly experienced engineers to deal with an accident.

Workers need to patrol plant sites, with all five senses sharpened.

I sometimes touched piping systems to see whether vibrations and temperatures were at normal levels.

FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

Q: Were workers not experienced enough to deal with the Fukushima No. 1 plant accident?

A: I think Masao Yoshida, plant chief at the time of the accident, and other TEPCO employees did their best immediately after the accident. Those who remain are still working hard.

Still, **it is true that compared with the past, fewer employees were well-versed with the plant's operations at the time of the accident. In the 1970s, a large number of TEPCO engineers were working on the plant site.**

Ryo Ikegame, who later became TEPCO vice president and was known as the last "don" who loved plants, was often found on the site. We used to have good debates.

In the 1980s and onward, TEPCO has left the plant's operations to contractors and manufacturers, apparently giving priority to management efficiency alone.

I continued to warn that a major accident was bound to occur, but I failed to make my case strongly enough.

Q: Where were you at the time of the accident?

A: I was at my company office in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture.

I called our employee who was at the Fukushima No. 2 plant and was told that power sources could be secured. But I thought a seawater pump at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, at 5 meters above sea level, would be damaged by tsunami.

I felt hopeless when I heard from our employee who was at the quake-proof building (of the Fukushima No. 1 plant) that all cooling facilities were halted.

Q: The Fukushima No. 1 plant remained in critical condition for some time.

A: It was only by luck that the containment vessels were not destroyed. We were overly confident that power plants were safe. We were also indulged because we covered up accidents and avoided facing pressure from the public.

We were forced to pay the price all at once. I have been disappointed by the crisis management of TEPCO and the government since the disaster.

I sent an e-mail to GE's nuclear power division immediately after the accident.

While Japan controls the radiation dose people receive on a single occasion, workers in the United States can be exposed to high levels of radiation if they agree.

Many professionals work under a high-radiation environment. The U.S. response to radiation is more severe than Japan's.

I asked GE to send such radiation professionals, and GE made arrangements, but our efforts failed to get incorporated into (those of) TEPCO or the government.

Q: How confused were the government and TEPCO immediately after the accident?

A: Our employees dealt with the accident along with TEPCO employees. It was tough to send them on a dangerous and severe mission, but they asked me to let them go.

All our employees are from the area, and they said they could not abandon their hometown. It made my eyes water.

Q: What condition is the Fukushima No. 1 plant in?

A: Temporary cooling systems have kept the reactors at low temperatures. A limited amount of water has been leaking from temporary piping systems, but it had probably been within TEPCO's expectations.

However, the company is still struggling to keep groundwater from flowing into buildings and dispose of radioactive water, and has been unable to start decommissioning the reactors.

Our company has been providing technology to support decommissioning, but the outlook remains unclear.

Q: How do you feel about the government's push of exports of nuclear plants to promote economic growth?

A: We are still on our way to putting an end to the accident, including investigations into its causes. **Under such circumstances, there cannot be restarting nuclear reactors or exporting them.**

When we build nuclear plants, the important thing is how to dispose of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel. Depending on the country, anti-terrorism measures are also necessary.

It is unthinkable to export nuclear reactors at a time when such requirements have not been fully met even in Japan.

Decommissioning is more important. Nuclear reactors around the world will go out of service someday. We will have a business opportunity if we establish the required technology.

The Fukushima No. 1 plant is where we can improve such technology. We should assemble talented engineers and acquire the world's top-class decommissioning technology at the reactors, which remain in severe condition.

I have heard that fewer students are studying nuclear energy in Japan. But I hope young people will come forward with a determination to save Japan with nuclear technology.

ISLAND OF RUBBLE?

Q: Are people outside Fukushima Prefecture losing interest in the nuclear accident?

A: I know there is not much to gain for politicians and bureaucrats by focusing their energy on Fukushima, which is nothing more than a provincial prefecture.

It also cannot be helped that people outside the prefecture have become less sympathetic. But I hope all Japanese will continue to be interested in Fukushima as fellow countrymen.

In May, I presented a Futaba County Island Construction Plan to heads of municipal governments in Futaba county.

It calls for creating a huge island off the Fukushima No. 1 plant from contaminated soil and rubble and building facilities for decommissioning as well as for disposal of and research on debris.

(A high level of) radiation is not expected on the island because it will be covered with a large amount of soil. All possible measures will be taken to prevent an adverse impact on the ocean.

Decontamination would be limited to a minimum, and the state budget would be directed toward reconstruction measures. All contaminated soil and rubble generated in Fukushima Prefecture would be temporarily stored in the county.

Q: Won't there be opposition to plans to minimize decontamination and accept radioactive soil?

A: The problem is that contaminated soil and rubble have been stored in various areas. We can keep them at an intermediate storage facility planned by the government until the proposed man-made island is completed.

I came up with the proposal for the purpose of reconstructing all of Fukushima Prefecture. In return, I expect government assistance in building the man-made island and other projects.

Q: The idea of a man-made island sounds like a fantasy.

A: Unless local communities stir up controversy, no one will pay attention. Will companies set up in a place full of abandoned homes? Can agriculture be revived when there are no successors? The government's approach is not realistic.

It is necessary for the local communities to raise issues, change the image of Futaba county drastically and develop an area where young people want to gather.

The Futaba County Island Construction Plan should contribute to decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and reconstructing local communities. I expect experts to study the feasibility of the project.

Q: Was it a good idea for Japanese to possess nuclear plants in the first place?

A: Japanese are more sensitive to radioactive materials than any other people because they experienced atomic bombings. But they gave no thought to the possibility of nuclear plants that generate radioactive materials becoming a negative legacy.

Nuclear plants supported economic growth, but I think we were overly insensitive to their negative aspects because we gave priority to economic growth.

Another problem is that we created an atmosphere that is not conducive to open discussions about nuclear plants.

I am not qualified to discuss the rights and wrongs of nuclear plants because I have lived with them. But I want to say **the public has a right to know accurate information about nuclear power, which can threaten their lives. That is the basic premise even if reactors should be restarted.**

Q: Will you continue to live in Fukushima?

A: I got married here and also built my house and tomb here.

I was able to clearly see the Fukushima No. 2 plant from my home in Tomioka, where I cannot live now. When I said it was a watch house (for the plant), a neighbor said, "I do not have to worry as long as you are here." When we met at an evacuation center after the earthquake, the neighbor said, "The watch house did not help." My heart wrenched.

People in Okinawa used to ask those on the mainland whether Okinawans were Japanese. I do not want to hear the same words from people in Fukushima. I do not want to see Fukushima turn into an abandoned land. That is the last hope of an engineer who has lived with nuclear plants in Fukushima.

By TAKAFUMI YOSHIDA/ Staff Writer

"Sun Child"

August 7, 2013

Sun Child' statue to symbolize Fukushima recovery at Aichi festival

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308070093>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NAGOYA—A giant child wearing a fluorescent yellow hazmat suit to guard against radiation arrived on Aug. 6 in one of the venues for Aichi Triennale 2013, a powerful symbol that conveys a message of hope for the future.

Contemporary artist Kenji Yanobe, 47, created the “Sun Child” statue hoping that the areas affected by the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant will recover from the disaster. The accident was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

“This is a monument of recovery that makes people think about the coming future,” Yanobe said.

The child, standing resolutely, holds his protective helmet in one hand. The Geiger counter that is installed on his chest to measure radiation levels reads zero.

Made of reinforced plastics, the 6-meter-high artwork has been displayed in domestic and overseas museums. Workers assembled it in the Aichi Arts Center in Nagoya’s Higashi Ward on Aug. 6 with a crane.

The statue is expected to serve as a symbol of this year’s Aichi Triennale, which aims to express the hopes of the post-quake society through artworks.

The international art festival opens here on Aug. 10.

Radiation protective suits to visit cemetery

August 13, 2013

Residents of Fukushima no-entry zone make hometown visit to family graves



Eiichi Tomita, right, and his wife Mutsuko visit their family grave in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, on Aug. 12 during the "Bon" festival period. The couple is clad in radiation protective gear because the area is designated as a "difficult-to-return zone." (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130813p2a00m0na007000c.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima -- Residents of this town that was reorganized into a new evacuation zone last year visited their family graves on Aug. 12 for the first time since the onset of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster in March 2011.

Areas home to 96 percent of residents from Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, were rezoned into a "difficult-to-return area," where evacuees are not allowed to return for at least five years. Residents of Okuma, as well as three other towns in the area, were allowed to enter their hometowns to visit their family graves during the "Bon" festival period until Aug. 25, although they have to wear radiation protection suits.

Eiichi Tomita, 70, and his 71-year-old wife Mutsuko came back to Okuma from a temporary housing unit in the prefectural city of Aizuwakamatsu just for this day to lay flowers in front of their family grave, which was knocked over by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

"We're a bit relieved to see the grave cleaned thanks to decontamination work, but we can't come back here as radiation dosages are still high," the couple said.

A statue for 7-year old Yuna

August 11, 2013

Father erects statue for daughter missing since 2011 tsunami

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201308110036

By TAKAYUKI KIHARA/ Staff Writer

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture—Since Norio Kimura cannot be with his youngest daughter, who was swept away by the tsunami of March 11, 2011, he has erected a small stone deity on a hillside to watch over her and keep her company forever.

Yuna was a first-grader at elementary school and was 7 years old. She was washed away by the wall of waves near her home after she returned from school.

Yuna is one of the 208 people who remain unaccounted for in Fukushima Prefecture, two years and five months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The image of the Jizo guardian deity of children was erected on July 31, ahead of the third Bon holiday season since the disaster.

It stands on a wooded hillside in a coastal area of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, 3.5 kilometers south of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Kimura, 48, could not look for Yuna because he had to evacuate the following day due to the accident at the nuclear plant.

His wife, Miyuki, 37, and father, Wataro, 77, also went missing, but their bodies were later found.

Kimura is evacuating to Hakuba, Nagano Prefecture, with Mayu, Yuna's elder sister, who is 12 years old. He looked for Yuna along the coast and amid rubble when he was allowed to return to Okuma once every three months. The only belonging he found was one of Yuna's shoes.

Kimura came up with the idea of erecting the Jizo statue about a year after the disaster.

He wanted Jizo to be with Yuna as a friend because she would feel lonely without anyone beside her. He hopes Jizo will keep a close eye on Yuna forever because he cannot stay with her.

One of his acquaintances had drawn a smiling Jizo on a message card to encourage him. Kimura asked a stonemason to create the image based on the drawing.

Kimura began preparations on the hill behind his former home in May when he was allowed to return to Okuma on his monthly visit.

He erected the image and memorial ahead of "Bon," in which people traditionally recognize ancestral souls, with help from his former neighbors in Okuma and acquaintances in Nagano Prefecture.

The memorial carries the names of Yuna, Miyuki and Wataro, as well as Kimura's message for the three.

"I was grateful because everyone got together for Yuna and the others," Kimura said.

The death toll from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami totaled 15,883, and 2,656 people remain unaccounted for in six prefectures.

Police, the Japan Coast Guard and other relief workers have searched for bodies mainly on and around the 11th of every month. But only 102 bodies have been recovered since Sept. 11, 2011, with only four this year.

"We have looked almost everywhere we can on land, such as ditches and ponds," a senior official of the Miyagi prefectural police said. "All we can do is to find a body washed ashore."

Yuna is the only person who remains unaccounted for in Okuma. Kimura still looks for Yuna by himself on his monthly visit. He is grateful for the police efforts but has mixed feelings about the ongoing search.

"I wonder whether the search activities should continue amid high levels of radiation because it is becoming difficult to find her," he said.

In the hardest-hit prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima, 2,652 people remain unaccounted for. For most of them, bereaved families have filed death registrations. In Fukushima Prefecture, registrations have not been submitted for only five persons.

Yuna is among them. Kimura said he knows she will not return home anymore, but he still wants her to remain among the ranks of the living.

By TAKAYUKI KIHARA/ Staff

Evacuation zones and Gov't

August 8, 2013

News Navigator: Why did the gov't reorganize evacuation zones?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130808p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The government recently completed reorganization of 11 municipalities around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in Fukushima Prefecture into three evacuation zones. The Mainichi answers common questions readers may have about the rezoning of evacuation areas.

Question: What is this rezoning for?

Answer: The national government sees the reorganization of evacuation zones as a step forward for residents to return to their homes. The government designated "no-entry zones" and "planned evacuation zones" in April 2011 after the onset of the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster in March mainly to prevent residents from being exposed to radiation. However, such evacuation orders didn't indicate when people could actually return home.

The government started the rezoning process after it announced in December 2011 that reactors are in a stage of cold shutdown and radioactive discharge had stopped.

Q: How are these areas rezoned?

A: The government rezoned 11 Fukushima municipalities into three areas according to radiation dosages. These three zones are: "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" (radiation exposure doses 20 millisieverts or less per year), "residency restriction zone" in which residents can't return for several years (radiation doses between over 20 millisieverts and 50 millisieverts per year) and "difficult-to-return zone" where residents can't go back for at least five years (radiation doses over 50 millisieverts per year). People still can't stay overnight or live in zones preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders, but the new situation could offer evacuees optimism for the future.

Q: Would the rezoning help evacuees return to their towns and advance disaster recovery?

A: People can enter the "residency restriction zone" and "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" during the day to clean up and repair their houses. The national and municipal governments can work on infrastructure as well as decontamination work. Private sectors are allowed to open up disaster

recovery-related businesses such as farming and gas stations. We can say that evacuees will be able to take small steps to return their lives to how they were before the disaster.

Meanwhile, "difficult-to-return" zones remain as restricted no-entry areas. The government hasn't set up decontamination plans for these parts. The Nagadoro district of Iitate was reorganized into "difficult-to-return" areas from "planned evacuation zones" and is now blocked with barricades.

Q: What will happen next?

A: The national government aims to bring residents home by working on the decontamination process. It plans to lift evacuation orders based on degrees of infrastructure recovery as well as with the consensus of residents. The Miyakoji district of Tamura completed all its decontamination work and residents are allowed a three-month stay from Aug. 1.

However, residents can't return there easily as people still have doubts about the effectiveness of decontamination work and young people are moving out of the area. Some residents have started to settle in places where they had evacuated. The government needs to understand the situation of each evacuee and plan support systems. (By Makoto Fukazu, Fukushima Bureau)

Test fishing stopped because of leak

August 9, 2013

Leak from Fukushima Daiichi halts test fishing

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130809_21.html

A fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture has discontinued test fishing there due to continued leakage of radioactive water into the sea from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Local fishermen suspended commercial operations after the nuclear accident at the plant in March 2011.

The Soma-Futaba Fisheries Cooperative had test fished north of the prefecture since June last year, to prepare for a resumption of commercial fishing.

Radioactive levels of marine samples from the area are far below government-set allowable levels. But it decided to stop, saying consumers would doubt that its catch was safe due to the leakage.

The cooperative said it hopes the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, will take appropriate measures to stop the leakage as soon as possible.

Akiko Kuraoka's sense of responsibility

August 16, 2013

Akiko Kuraoka's documentaries find fresh relevancy amid Fukushima crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/08/16/our-lives/akiko-kuraokas-documentaries-find-fresh-relevancy-amid-fukushima-crisis/#.Ug5wlaxSab0>

by Michael Kleindl
Special To The Japan Times

For Akiko Kuraoka, filmmaker, lecturer and freelance French translator, films have always been her passion. Over a span of nearly four decades, Kuraoka has made three documentaries and is now deep into her fourth. Her films have dealt with chromium pollution, nuclear radiation, war, and the displacement and suffering of people living intimately with those dangers.

Though she produced all three films and co-directed one of them, Kuraoka says filmmaking is not her job. Nor is it her hobby.

She makes her films, which have garnered attention and awards at festivals in France, Scotland, Germany, Hong Kong and throughout Japan, out of a sense of personal responsibility and from a sustained anger at injustice. "We have to be responsible not only for our own life," she says, "but also for others' lives."

Kuraoka credits her critical eyes and attitude to her father. "To protest something was in his nature."

Kuraoka was born in 1947 in the city of Aomori. Her father, she says, had studied French literature and wanted to become a translator. He didn't want to become a soldier but eventually had to join the army near the end of the war.

Her father ended up taking over the family's kimono shop business. And Kuraoka grew up in a household filled with talk about French literature, books and poetry. "So it was natural for me to study that as well," she says.

She studied philosophy and French literature at Sophia University in Tokyo. After graduation, she worked in the economic department of the French Embassy for several years, then took a position at the Athénée Français Cultural Center organizing shows of Japanese and international films. She also conducted seminars on the technologies and aesthetics of film.

During an interview in a Shinjuku cafe, Kuraoka spoke with directness and energy, often using French words when the English equivalent didn't come to mind.

"I've always been interested in the relationship between technology and civilization," she says. She starts to list the problems Japan had in the 1960s that were caused by technological development and industrialization. She mentions Minamata disease, the affliction caused by mercury poisoning from a chemical plant; and itai-itai disease recognized in 1968 as being caused by cadmium poisoning from mines.

In the early 1970s, Kuraoka became interested in the chromium pollution problem caused by old chemical factories in Koto and Edogawa wards in Tokyo. With no formal training in filmmaking and no financial backing, she decided to document the damage to those neighborhoods and the local people, so as to make the problem known to a wider audience.

The film, "Live in Tokyochrome," was directed by her husband at the time, Nobuki Yamamura, who had studied directing and editing. Finished in 1978, the film was shown with much acclaim in Japan and France. "Serious soil contamination from chromium still persists in those wards today," she adds.

Work on her second film, "The People of Rokkasho" (1985), which she co-directed with Yamamura, began in 1980 when Kuraoka became interested in the lives of Aomori women who had to carry on alone for six months a year when their husbands, mostly fishermen and farmers, left during the long severe winter to find work elsewhere in Japan. "I was interested in interviewing those women," she recalls, "to ask them how they ended up in Aomori. And how they managed to live."

In 1982 the couple started working seriously on the film. During their summer vacations they would go to Aomori to interview and film residents of the village of Rokkasho, while the rest of the year they took up other jobs to make enough money to finance the film.

Then in January 1984, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan announced to the Aomori people their plan to build three nuclear fuel facilities near Rokkasho: a reprocessing plant (including a high-level waste storage center), a uranium enrichment plant and a low-level radioactive waste disposal center.

"The focus of the film completely changed after that announcement," says Kuraoka. The film took a three-year-long look at village life in Rokkasho — the slow loss of traditions, the changing sense of community, and the attitudes of the local residents in reaction to industrialization and the eventual development of the nuclear complex.

The film won a special award at the Mannheim International Film Festival in 1986. That same year it was also shown in the George Pompidou Center in Paris.

The third film, “Summer Homework Left Undone: Living Next Door to Nuclear Reprocessing Facility” (1989), touches on some of the same issues raised in the previous film.

In 1985, the Rokkasho nuclear development plan was approved by the Aomori Prefectural Government. “We wanted to know the consequences of such a development,” she says. The cities of La Hague in France and Sellafield in northwest England had similar reprocessing facilities, “and we decided to go see how residents there coped with that situation.”

Three years later, Kuraoka and Yamamura were able to travel for a month interviewing and filming the testimonies of the local English and French residents who, says Kuraoka, suffered from health problems caused by years of living next to nuclear fuel reprocessing plants.

The films “The People of Rokkasho” and “Summer Homework Left Undone” have apparently not lost their relevance nor their power to move people. In February 2011, Kuraoka got a call from a Japanese theater chain asking her to speak and to show those two films the following April to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

“Then the March 11 disaster happened,” says Kuraoka, referring to the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear reactor meltdowns in Fukushima. “So, plenty of people came to see my movies.” She has since been invited to lecture and show those films in venues across Japan.

After 3/11, many people came out against nuclear energy and huge demonstrations were held against restarting reactors, “but the results of the December 2012 election was a catastrophe,” she says. The re-election of conservative lawmakers guaranteed continued use of nuclear power in this country, she says, adding that the election showed that the Japanese people “learned nothing” from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Chernobyl or Fukushima.

She also criticized the French and Japanese governments, which, during a June meeting between visiting President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, extolled Japan’s nuclear technology and agreed to jointly promote export of nuclear power plants to other countries. “That’s nonsense! Those plants in Fukushima leak every day!” she says, referring to the radiation-contaminated groundwater escaping from the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant.

Still, Kuraoka says she’s not an activist. “I show my movies, so that individuals can think for themselves, and start to learn, or study, and act by their own subjective judgment,” she says.

Her latest film project concerns Palestinian children. More than 10 years ago, a French professor asked her to help show a few Palestinian films in Tokyo. "I started to help, and I saw several movies that really impressed me."

She saw how international groups helped Palestinian children by teaching them practical skills like sewing. But even if children learn such skills, "there are no jobs, no future," she says. "And for children, having no future is the worst thing in the world."

Again, Kuraoka wanted to see the situation for herself. So, for two weeks in December 2003, she and Yamamura went to the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem to film and conduct interviews. But for various personal reasons, nothing happened with the film for several years. She went back to Sophia University to get a doctorate in French literature, and in 2006 she and Yamamura divorced.

"I decided to continue the film alone," she says. "But I also understood that without being able to speak the Arabic language, it's nothing. So I started to learn Arabic." In 2008, she went back to the Palestinian territory by herself to see what had changed. Then in 2010, she went to Lebanon and Syria to visit Palestinians living in refugee camps. In 2012, Kuraoka went again for 20 days to film in the West Bank.

"I want to be useful somehow to the Palestinian people" because she feels they are neglected, she says, adding that she intends to finish the film this year.

"Also, my main objective is to show Japanese young people that they need to go outside of Japan and see what's happening in the world," she says. "Individual responsibility is essential. We must study by ourselves. Our knowledge shouldn't depend on the government."

This month, Kuraoka will be in Aomori working on the Palestinian film, arranging more showings of her earlier films, and checking on the people of Rokkasho, where the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel has not yet started after so many years.

For further information, or to enquire about a showing of her films, contact akkuraoka@hotmail.com .

"Trumpet girl"

August 17, 2013

'Trumpet girl' of 2011 disaster heads local festival committee**

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201308170013>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A teenager wipes away tears after playing her golden trumpet. One month from the day the tsunami killed her mother and grandparents, the rubble of what was once her family home in the background, Ruri Sasaki mournfully plays her horn to pray for the souls of her lost relatives.

It is one of countless enduring images in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

Now 19, Sasaki is currently heading the executive committee for Rikuzentakata's Wakodo Festival, an event first held in 2012 by young people to revitalize the city.

This year's festival will be held Aug. 17 at Takata Elementary School, featuring music performances by junior and senior high school students as well as other musicians who call Rikuzentakata home.

"My town, its residents and history, I realized how little I knew about these," Sasaki says. "I was reminded of these things by connecting with many people (after the disaster)."

Last year, Sasaki enrolled at the School of Nursing at Fukushima Medical University. Now a sophomore, she is active in the university's club activities. She is on the swimming team, plays bass with a music club and serves as manager of the track club.

Sasaki enjoyed the festival as a guest last year, but this year, she wanted to be more involved and joined the executive committee. All 11 members of the committee are from Rikuzentakata and attending universities outside Iwate Prefecture.

On Aug. 16, Sasaki was busy delivering tents and making ornaments at Takata Elementary.

Being away from home for 16 months, she says she has come to think of her hometown more warmly than before.

"Many young people left the city after the disaster," she says. "But many of them want to be part of the reconstruction effort."

Many people in Rikuzentakata have a strong affection for their hometown, Sasaki adds. She said she hopes their love for their city will make the festival successful.

Last year's executive committee chairman, Shunsuke Shimamura, a senior at Akita University, appreciates Sasaki's enthusiasm.

"She is working hard and is shining," says the 21-year-old Shimamura. "She has a growing large circle of friends. Moving forward little by little, she is enjoying watching the event take shape."

Sasaki has been getting her performing chops in shape, too. She will play a trumpet solo at the festival and also perform with a professional trumpet player she met in Fukushima.

"I want to nurture the Wakodo Festival so that it becomes even bigger in the future and involves the surrounding communities," she says.

The festival will be held from 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on the grounds of Takata Elementary School. For more information (in Japanese), visit (wakoudo.jimdo.com/).

Fukushima residents sue TEPCO for lack of assistance

August 20, 2013

Fukushima residents to sue gov't for inaction on nuke disaster support law

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130820p2a00m0na013000c.html>

A group of residents from Fukushima Prefecture is poised to sue the government for its "illegal" failure to implement provisions of a law to support nuclear disaster victims more than a year after its enactment.

The some 20 plaintiffs -- residents in Fukushima Prefecture and those who have voluntarily evacuated outside the prefecture -- are filing the suit with the Tokyo District Court, demanding the central government draw up a basic policy under the Act on the Protection and Support for the Children and other Victims of TEPCO Disaster, which was enacted in June 2012.

The Reconstruction Agency, which administers the measures set out in the law, has yet to create radiation dose standards that are to be used to set which areas are eligible for support. The government's inaction has led to a delay in providing support to residents and voluntary evacuees affected by the nuclear catastrophe.

The plaintiffs include residents in the Fukushima Prefecture cities of Fukushima and Koriyama, which are outside the designated evacuation zones where annual radiation doses top 20 millisieverts, as well as those who voluntarily evacuated outside the prefecture. The group also includes residents in Nasushiobara, Tochigi Prefecture, and Marumori, Miyagi Prefecture, where radiation doses are relatively high.

An appendix to the disaster support law stipulates that areas to be covered by support measures should be reviewed every year based on radiation dose surveys. The plaintiffs, therefore, call it "illegal" that a basic policy hasn't been worked out more than a year since the enactment of the law, whose appendix presupposes that a basic policy is put together within a year of enactment.

The plaintiffs also maintain that the annual radiation dose limit for the general public should be 1 millisievert, and that areas where radiation levels exceed that limit should be subject to support measures. The plaintiffs argue that they all should be covered by aid schemes based on radiation doses at the time the law was enacted in June last year.

However, because radiation dose standards have not yet been set, neither areas to be supported under the law nor a basic policy have been determined, leaving nuclear disaster victims' plight unaddressed, the plaintiffs say. They specifically criticize the government for failing to provide housing and employment assistance to plaintiffs who evacuated voluntarily, and to aid plaintiffs in areas where subsidized health checks may be available due to local radiation exposure.

Earlier this year, a senior Reconstruction Agency official in charge of supporting Fukushima nuclear disaster victims was criticized for repeatedly tweeting defamatory comments against an NGO, lawmakers and others involved in disaster recovery efforts.

On March 8, he tweeted, "One of the pending issues was resolved today. To be precise, the concerned parties agreed to leave the matter ambiguous, with no black and white decisions" -- apparently praising the government's postponing of consideration of radiation dose criteria and a basic policy under the law. In fact, the Reconstruction Agency hasn't even specified a target deadline for formulating the basic policy and dose criteria yet.

Lawsuit to demand action on law to support nuclear disaster victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308200050>

By KAORI OZAWA/ Staff Writer

Nineteen people, fearing for their finances and their children's health, will sue the government over its prolonged failure to provide assistance under a law to support all victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, sources said.

The plaintiffs, who have been excluded from the existing support framework due to the location of their homes, will demand damages of 1 yen (1 cent) each.

Lawyer Kenji Fukuda said the litigants are seeking a token amount "to represent all victims distressed and worried by the disaster, instead of asking for individual damages."

Specifically, they want the government to establish a basic policy under the law that was enacted in June 2012 to support children and others affected by the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

In the lawsuit, they will ask the Tokyo District Court to confirm that the government's inaction in providing assistance under the law has been illegal.

The law, drawn up by a bipartisan group of lawmakers, guarantees assistance in housing and health care, regardless of whether the recipients live in disaster areas, have moved to other areas or have returned from evacuation.

It also says assistance will be provided in areas where radiation levels exceed certain standards and calls for a basic policy covering radiation standards and relief measures.

The plaintiffs, from 16 households, consist of 12 people who left areas where the government did not issue evacuation orders, such as Fukushima and Koriyama, both in Fukushima Prefecture, and seven people who still live in such areas.

People who voluntarily left areas that were not designated for evacuation and those who continued to live in those areas are not eligible for assistance under the current support framework.

More than two years after the nuclear accident started on March 11, 2011, 150,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture still live away from their homes, including many who voluntarily evacuated.

Takahiro Kobayashi, one of the prospective plaintiffs, evacuated from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, out of concerns for the health of his four children.

“At the least, the government should provide assistance on its own responsibility” in health checkups, housing and work, said the 40-year-old, who now works at a forestry cooperative in Nakatsugawa, Gifu Prefecture.

The Fukushima prefectural government is studying the health impact of radiation on residents of the prefecture, but Kobayashi’s children have not received examinations because there is no medical institution nearby where the service is available.

Kobayashi could not find a suitable house to rent so he took out a loan worth 5 million yen to buy a home. He also borrowed living expenses from relatives.

“I felt I should speak up also for families who are suffering around the country after voluntarily evacuating (from Fukushima Prefecture),” he said.

Tokiko Noguchi, another plaintiff-to-be, stayed in Koriyama because her eldest daughter, then a fifth-grader, said she wanted to graduate from elementary school with her friends.

The 48-year-old mother is most worried about health of her two children and pays for their thyroid gland and blood examinations out of the family expenses.

Government assistance for health checkups will not be provided unless Koriyama is designated an eligible area in the basic policy under the support law.

“I want (the government) to determine standards for protecting our health as soon as possible,” Noguchi said.

The support law stipulates that opinions of disaster victims should be reflected in formulating the basic policy, but the government has not taken any steps.

Work to establish the basic policy has not made progress partly because it is difficult to set radiation standards for areas eligible for assistance.

Some disaster victims said government officials are concerned that the number of evacuees will increase depending on demarcation and negative publicity will spread about designated areas.

A multipartisan group of lawmakers was formed in January to work out measures under the law, but the Diet has not made any move in that direction.

Fukushima residents to sue state for lack of aid

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130820_21.html

Residents of Fukushima Prefecture, home to the crippled nuclear power plant, will sue the central government for negligence in providing assistance one year after the enactment of a relevant law.

The law enacted in June last year mandates medical, housing and other support to current and former residents of areas where radioactive levels are higher than usual but were not designated as evacuation

zones.

The 19 people who are filing the lawsuit live in, or have evacuated from such areas.

The group is expected to charge that the government violated the law because it has failed to draw up the guidelines necessary to deliver assistance.

The plaintiffs' lawyers say it is disgraceful that the law has not been applied despite being enacted more than one year ago. They are calling on the government to address the issue immediately.

Family sues TEPCO

August 20, 2013

Fukushima plant worker's family sues TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130820_44.html

The wife of a worker at the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant is demanding compensation from 4 companies for his death on the job.

Nobukatsu Osumi died of a cardiac infarction on the second day of his job at the plant in May 2011. The plumber worked at a waste-processing facility at the site. He was 60 years old.

His Thai wife, Kanika Osumi, filed a suit on Tuesday with a district court in Shizuoka Prefecture. She is demanding that Tokyo Electric Power Company and 3 other firms pay 30.8 million yen, or about 320,000 dollars, in compensation.

She argues that her husband died because the work site lacked appropriate medical care or health management and she wants to be compensated for her mental suffering.

In February 2012, a regional labor standards inspection office recognized Osumi's death as being work-related and eligible for compensation.

The plaintiff says none of the companies have apologized and she took action in the hope of clarifying who should be held responsible for her husband's death.

A TEPCO official says the company would rather not comment on the lawsuit.

Deadline for compensation almost up

August 21, 2013

Deadline for Fukushima victims

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/08/21/editorials/deadline-for-fukushima-victims/#.UhXak39Sab0>

In mid-September, 2½ years will have passed since the start of the nuclear catastrophe at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Contamination of the environment with radioactive substances from the crippled plant continues unabated today despite the efforts of Tepco. **The lives of hundreds of thousands of Fukushima residents have been irrevocably changed by the nuclear disaster, and some 150,000 people still cannot return to their homes even today.**

Due to a civil code provision that limits compensation claims to three years after a person becomes aware of damage, the right of victims of the nuclear disaster to claim compensation will begin to expire in March 2014 unless the Diet establishes special legislation.

To apply this civil code provision to victims of the Fukushima nuclear fiasco is wrong in view of the unparalleled scale and ongoing duration of the disaster. The government and political parties must enact legislation in the Diet session this autumn to greatly lengthen the period in which victims can claim compensation from Tepco.

For some time, attention has been focused on the pending deadline to claim compensation. In February, Tepco announced it would consider the prescribed period to be “interrupted” when victims of the fiasco finally received the documents from Tepco needed for claiming compensation.

This response is grossly inadequate. Tepco is sending such documents only to a limited number of people whom it regards as victims. And even some of them might not have received the documents for various reasons. Still others may find it difficult to prove the extent of their suffering and losses. Tepco says that it will flexibly deal with the matter even if the right to claim compensation expires. But this is hardly assuring as it depends on Tepco's judgment, which — given how the company has been mismanaging the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant — can hardly be trusted

Compensation for Fukushima nuclear accident victims is large in scope and complex. An estimated 1 million people have suffered from the accident. Compensation covers a wide range of things, including consolation money, damage to property, costs needed for evacuation, and financial damage suffered by farmers and fishermen because of rumors that their products are contaminated with radioactive substances.

It will take an enormous amount of time for victims to collect evidence and properly fill out compensation documents.

The victims had their daily lives disrupted by the nuclear accident and they were not at fault. None of them should be deprived of his or her right to claim compensation because the civil code sets an expiration date. It is imperative that the government and political parties strive to enact a new law so that all the victims of the nuclear disaster can exercise their right to claim compensation.

Anger

August 22, 2013

Fukushima fishermen delay resuming business due to toxic water leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130822p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- A fisheries cooperative in Iwaki city, Fukushima Prefecture that has been voluntarily suspending business since the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, decided Wednesday to postpone a trial operation that had been set for Sept. 5.

The cooperative has yet to set a new date. Masakazu Yabuki, head of the cooperative, told reporters after a meeting that, "We believe that (the decision to postpone the operation) is logical as we hear about issues over the leakage into the ocean of contaminated water day in, day out. We intend to conduct the trial operation if the situation settles down."

The cooperative originally planned to start the test operation in waters off the city from Sept. 5, aiming to ship their goods after checking them for radioactive materials to confirm their safety.

The majority of meeting participants said that starting the operation on Sept. 5 would be difficult after it came to light in July that radioactive water has been spilling into the Pacific Ocean from the nuclear power plant.

Fisheries operations have been voluntarily suspended in the prefecture facing the Pacific following the 2011 accident. In June last year, the Soma Futaba fisheries cooperative started a test operation off the coast of Soma city, north of the crippled plant. Iwaki City is located south of the plant.

See also:

Fukushima fishermen delay resuming business due to toxic water leak

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/22/national/fukushima-fishermen-delay-resuming-business-due-to-toxic-water-leak/#.UhXaLn9Sab0>

August 21, 2013

Anger boils over in Fukushima Pref. after news of new radioactive water leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130821p2a00m0na012000c.html>

"It's just one problem after another."

That's what one angry Fukushima Prefecture resident had to say about Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s latest accident, a leak of some 300 metric tons of toxic water from a storage tank on the grounds of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The resident isn't the only one frustrated with TEPCO and the utility's apparent inability to catch up with all the problems besetting the nuclear station. Local anger has been on high boil since the discovery earlier this year that ground water badly tainted with radioactive substances was leaking into the Pacific Ocean, delaying the coastal fishery's plans to begin test catches for the first time since the March 2011 meltdowns.

"We want these problems dealt with for what they are, a national emergency," said Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato.

The storage tank, marked with a black arrow, suspected of leaking some 300 tons of toxic water, is seen on the grounds of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in Fukushima Prefecture on Aug. 20. (Mainichi) TEPCO Managing Director Tsunemasa Niitsuma was at an information session in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture -- close to the stricken No. 1 plant -- on Aug. 20 to apologize to the local fishing cooperative for the latest leak. At the top of the agenda for the session was countermeasures TEPCO is taking to stop contaminated groundwater from seeping into the sea. The recently discovered storage tank leak, however, soon horned its way into proceedings.

The some 150 fishing cooperative members on-hand poured criticism onto Niitsuma, including one attendee who said, "All your countermeasures look like nothing but makeshift expedients."

Test catches off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture were scheduled to begin in September this year, but have been postponed indefinitely due to the radioactive groundwater leaks.

Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations Chairman Tetsu Nozaki summed up the general distrust of TEPCO when he wondered if the utility "can really deal with the crisis on its own. This problem ought to be dealt with as a national problem."

After news of the leaking tank broke, Fukushima Prefecture formally demanded that TEPCO investigate the cause of the latest accident and implement countermeasures. The prefecture also held an emergency meeting of department heads concerned with the crisis to deliberate a response.

"We've repeatedly demanded that TEPCO improve its safety management, and this latest incident is very frustrating," Gov. Saito commented.

Fishing suspended

August 22, 2013

Fishing off Fukushima suspended for indefinite period

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/22/national/fishing-off-fukushima-suspended-for-indefinite-period/#.UhZvpX9Sab0>

FUKUSHIMA – A fisheries co-op in Soma Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, said Thursday it will end its trial catch at the end of this month, signaling an indefinite halt to all local fishing operations off the prefecture because of the constant flow of highly radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant into the Pacific.

The move by the co-op in Soma Futaba, in the northern part of the prefecture, follows a decision by a co-op in Iwaki, in the southern part, to drop plans to resume operations on a trial basis from Sept. 5.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Monday it noticed puddles with high radiation levels near an area where a number of radioactive water storage tanks stand at the Fukushima plant. At least one of the tanks has been leaking, and it is believed the water it contained seeped down and merged with tainted groundwater that is flowing to the sea, and ran to the Pacific in drainage channels.

Tepeco later admitted that 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from the tank, which should have been holding about 1,000 tons. It said Wednesday that water from the tank probably flowed to the ocean through drainage channels.

Hiroyuki Sato, head of the Soma Futaba cooperative, said, "We want the central government to take steps to pull us out of this trouble as quickly as possible."

The nuclear meltdown crisis, which started after the March 11, 2011, mega-quake and tsunami, led to the halt of fishing operations off Fukushima.

The Soma Futaba cooperative started the trial operation off the city of Soma in June 2012. The Iwaki co-op had planned to start its first trial operation next month.

Families sue TEPCO (follow-up)

August 23, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130823p2g00m0dm017000c.html>

FuFukushima nuclear victims sue government for neglecting aid

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A group of 19 Fukushima residents and evacuees on Thursday sued the government for what they see as inaction in implementing a law enacted in June last year to provide support to those affected by the nuclear crisis.

The lawsuit, filed with the Tokyo District Court, aims to have the government acknowledge the eligibility of the plaintiffs for aid under the law by seeking a nominal 1 yen in damages for each plaintiff.

"The Reconstruction Agency in charge of the matter is intentionally not paying heed" to the issue, their lawyer, Kenji Fukuda, said at a press conference after the filing.

The suit alleges it is illegal that the state has not taken steps to implement measures under the law designed to offer support for relocation, schooling, employment as well as to subsidize health care costs for children and pregnant women.

The law stipulates that residents in, or evacuees from, places where a certain amount of radiation from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has been recorded are entitled to government support.

The lawsuit cites a lack of a basic policy detailing radiation levels that warrant eligibility for aid as well as specific measures of support.

The plaintiffs said similar basic policies were established under many laws within a year after they were enacted.

One of the plaintiffs, Yasuhiro Tanji, 36, has fled to Okayama City from Fukushima City with his whole family. "I have no idea what will happen to health care arrangements for children. We want the government to formulate (the guidelines) soon," he said at the press conference.

The central government has apparently faced difficulty in striking a balance in determining aid eligibility criteria as evacuees seek broad areas of coverage while local governments are concerned such aid coverage designation under the law could prompt an outflow of population.

Masao Yoshida's memorial service

August 23, 2013

Funeral for former head of Fukushima power plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130823_29.html

More than 1,000 people have attended a memorial service for the former head of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Masao Yoshida dealt with the nuclear disaster that occurred after the massive earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan on March 11th, 2011.

Yoshida died of esophageal cancer on July 9th. He was 58 years old.

Among those at the service in Tokyo on Friday were Tokyo Electric Power Company officials, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and government officials who helped respond to the nuclear disaster.

Yoshida took the lead in trying to put the plant's troubled reactors under control. He defied orders from Tokyo Electric's headquarters to stop injecting seawater to cool one of the reactors.

But the firm's in-house investigation committee accused Yoshida of failing to take any measures against huge tsunamis. Three years before the accident, the utility said an unexpectedly large tsunami might occur. Yoshida reportedly said related research was inconclusive.

Much remains unknown about the large amount of radiation leaked in the disaster and early responses by the firm and Japan's government. Yoshida's death casts a shadow on efforts to investigate the accident.

Naoto Kan of the opposition Democratic Party was prime minister at the time of the disaster. Kan told reporters that Yoshida played a critical role in keeping the disaster from expanding, and that his death is regrettable.

Lucky evacuees!

PHOTO: National hula competition held in Fukushima to lift evacuees' spirits***

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201308260097>

By TAKEMICHI NISHIBORI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--High school hula dancers from all over Japan competed here Aug. 25 to encourage those still trying to recover from the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident.

“We danced very expressively with hopes of being of some help for victims recovering from the disaster,” said Wakana Matsushita, 16, a second-year student at Nobeoka Gakuen High School in Miyazaki Prefecture.

The third Hula Girls Koshien competition took place in the hometown of the famed Hula Girls dance troupe, who dance at the Spa Resort Hawaiians, the city’s major leisure facility.

A record 160 students, from 23 high schools in Tokyo and nine other prefectures, showed off their hula and Tahitian dance skills during the competition.

Tokiwagi Gakuen High School in Sendai won the prize for best performance for the second year in a row.

The top five schools in the competition were to give a dance exhibition at the Spa Resort Hawaiians on Aug. 26.

Some of the participating schools arrived in Fukushima Prefecture days before the competition so that they could visit people forced to evacuate to Iwaki from their hometowns by the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The students visited temporary housing and entertained the evacuees with dances.

Power restored... after two years and five months

August 26, 2013

Power finally restored in quake-hit region two years after disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201308260108>

By MIHO TANAKA/ Staff Writer

ISHINOMAKI, Miyagi Prefecture--It took two years and five months, but all the lights are finally back on here after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated the coastal city on March 11, 2011.

Power was restored to 13 houses in the Nagatsura and Onozaki districts of Ishinomaki on Aug. 25, the last areas to remain without electricity in the nation, other than those immediately adjacent to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"I used to take electricity for granted before the disaster, but the lack of it has shown me the importance of power," said Hideki Ogawa, 32, a fish culture worker and a former resident of the Onozaki district.

Ogawa, who currently lives in temporary housing, visited his workshop in the district to confirm that power was actually restored.

"This is where we make a new start," he added.

The Nagatsura and Onozaki districts have also been designated special "disaster danger" zones, allowing the local government to ban residents from new construction or expanding their houses there.

About 150 workers from Tohoku Electric Power Co. and its subsidiaries installed a total of four kilometers of wire to restore power to the districts

Class action against Government &TEPCO

August 27, 2013

Nuclear accident evacuees to sue government, TEPCO for damages

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308270069>

By GEN OKAMOTO/ Staff Writer

OSAKA--Residents of Fukushima Prefecture and other areas who evacuated after the onset of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are planning to file lawsuits in district courts in the Kansai region against the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator.

About 140 plaintiffs will seek a total of about 1 billion yen (\$10 million) as compensation for psychological stress suffered due to the nuclear accident and for the upending of their daily lives.

These will be the first lawsuits to be filed in western Japan. On March 11, 2013, the second anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, 1,650 residents and evacuees filed lawsuits in district courts in eastern Japan.

According to lawyers for the plaintiffs, those who will join in the lawsuit will be 12 residents of Minami-Soma, Namie and Tomioka of Fukushima Prefecture where evacuation instructions were issued after the nuclear accident, as well as about 130 other residents of Fukushima, Miyagi and Ibaraki prefectures.

Lawsuits will be submitted to the district courts in Osaka and Kyoto on Sept. 17, and to Kobe District Court in late September.

The lawyers will argue that the central government failed to take necessary safety measures, even though it recognized the danger of an accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The compensation will be for being forced to evacuate, as well as expenses incurred in the process of leading lives as evacuees and leaving some family members behind in Fukushima.

Some plaintiffs also plan to seek compensation for damage to their homes.

According to officials of the Reconstruction Agency, as of Aug. 12, there were a total of 61,355 residents of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate who fled their prefectures after the natural disasters and nuclear accident.

A number of prospective plaintiffs met with the media on Aug. 26 to explain their decision to sue the government and TEPCO.

Katsutoshi Sato, 52, had a home in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, that was 45 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. However, due to health concerns, Sato evacuated with his 76-year-old mother, 52-year-old wife and 17-year-old daughter to Ritto, Shiga Prefecture, where his younger brother lives. March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake hit, was the date for his daughter's graduation ceremony at her junior high school.

After the nuclear accident, Sato made round trips between Fukushima and Shiga on a weekly basis to try to maintain the equipment company that he owned. However, sales dropped by about 70 percent and his wife was hospitalized with post-traumatic stress disorder.

In spring 2012, Sato decided to abandon plans to rebuild his company and shifted his residence to Ritto. Although he now works as a temporary worker at a citizens' activity center in neighboring Otsu, his income has decreased sharply.

"My life was destroyed by the accident," Sato said at the Aug. 26 news conference. "I want to pursue the responsibility of the central government and TEPCO through the lawsuit."

Akiko Morimatsu, 39, who will head the plaintiffs' group, evacuated from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to Osaka with her 5-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter.

"I want the case to serve as a way to protect the health and future of my children," Morimatsu said.

74 Fukushima evacuees to file class action suit against gov't, TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130827p2a00m0na012000c.html>

OSAKA -- Seventy-four people, who were forced to evacuate from Fukushima Prefecture to the Kansai region in central Japan in the wake of the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, are poised to file a class action lawsuit against the state and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), their lawyers revealed on Aug. 26.

The lawyers told reporters in Osaka that 74 people from 27 households would file the suit collectively with the Osaka District Court on Sept. 17, demanding compensation for mental suffering and other factors. The 74 people are men and women who fled from Fukushima Prefecture to Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, Shiga and Mie prefectures.

Arguing that they lost their property, personal relationships, and other things in the nuclear disaster, they will demand the government and TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station, pay about 15 million yen each in damages caused by the atomic crisis.

This is the first class action suit to be filed in the Kansai region over the nuclear disaster, although similar suits have been filed with district courts in Fukushima, Tokyo and elsewhere.

Separately, 31 people from 16 households who evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture and elsewhere to Kyoto Prefecture are due to file a similar class action suit with the Kyoto District Court on Sept. 17, and other evacuees who currently reside in Hyogo Prefecture will also file a similar lawsuit with the Kobe District Court possibly next month.

The lawyers argue that a 2002 government survey suggested the possibility of a major earthquake occurring near the Fukushima nuclear plant, and that a severe accident triggered by an earthquake and tsunami could have been predicted. They also insist that the nuclear disaster occurred because TEPCO failed to take measures such as reviewing its earthquake-resistant design and the government did not urge the utility to take necessary steps.

The people who plan to file the class action suit with the Kyoto District Court are those who evacuated from Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures. They will demand the state and TEPCO pay 5 million yen each in damages for their suffering.

The people who plan to file the class action suit with the Kyoto District Court are those who evacuated from Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures. They will demand the state and TEPCO pay 5 million yen each in damages for their suffering.

More Fukushima evacuees to sue Tepco, government

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/26/national/more-fukushima-evacuees-to-sue-tepco-government/#.Uhyf-H9Sb9k>

OSAKA – More people forced to evacuate by the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power station are preparing to sue Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the state, their lawyers announced Monday.

A group of 74 people representing 27 families will file the lawsuit with the Osaka District Court on Sept. 17, seeking around ¥15 million per head for psychological and other damage suffered from the event in Fukushima Prefecture, the lawyers said.

Similar suits have been filed in Hokkaido, Tokyo, and Yamagata, Chiba, Niigata and Aichi prefectures. The 27 people are from 12 municipalities in Fukushima, including the town of Namie and the city of Minamisoma, who are now living in the Kinki region prefectures of Mie, Shiga, Kyoto, Osaka and Nara. More evacuees may join the suit, the lawyers said.

The group will argue that Tepco should have taken stronger measures to protect the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant from earthquakes and tsunami after the government's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion warned in 2002 that there was 20 percent chance of a magnitude 8 or so quake occurring in the Japan Trench in the Pacific Ocean within 30 years, the lawyers said.

Fukushima fishermen's despair

August 28, 2013

Fukushima crisis new blow to fishermen's hopes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308280085>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

YOTSUKURA--Fumio Suzuki, a third-generation fisherman, sets out into the Pacific Ocean every seven weeks. Not to catch fish that he can sell but to catch fish that can be tested for radiation.

For the last 2 years, fishermen from the port of Yotsukura near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have been mostly stuck on land with little to do. There is no commercial fishing along most of the Fukushima coast. In a nation highly sensitive to food safety, there is no market for the fish caught near the stricken plant because the meltdowns it suffered contaminated the ocean water and marine life with radiation.

A sliver of hope emerged after recent sampling results showed a decline in radioactivity in some fish species. But a new crisis spawned by fresh leaks of radioactive water from the Fukushima plant last week may have dashed those prospects.

Fishermen like 47-year-old Suzuki now wonder whether they ever will be able to resume fishing, a mainstay for many small rural communities like Yotsukura, 45 kilometers south of the Fukushima plant. His son has already moved on, looking for work in construction.

"The operators (of the plant) are reacting too late every time in whatever they do," said Suzuki, who works with his 79-year-old father Choji after inheriting the family business from him.

"We say, 'Don't spill contaminated water,' and they spilled contaminated water. They are always a step behind so that is why we can't trust them," Suzuki said, as his trawler, the Ebisu Maru, traveled before dawn to a point about 45 kilometers offshore from the Fukushima plant to bring back a test catch.

With his father at the wheel, Suzuki dropped the heavy nets out the back of the boat, as the black of night faded to a sapphire sky, tinged orange at the horizon.

As the sun rose over a glassy sea, father and son hauled in the heavily laden nets and then set to the hard work of sorting the fish: sardines, starfish, sole, sea bream, sand sharks, tossing them into yellow and blue plastic baskets as sea gulls screamed and swooped overhead.

Five hours later, the Ebisu Maru docked at Yotsukura where waiting fishermen dumped the samples into coolers and rushed them to a nearby laboratory to be gutted and tested.

Suzuki says his fisheries co-operative will decide sometime soon whether to persist in gathering samples. For now they will have to survive on compensation from the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant's operator.

The cooperative also had plans to start larger-scale test catches next month that would potentially also be for consumption if radiation levels were deemed safe.

But those plans were put on hold after more bad news last week: authorities discovered that a massive amount of partially treated, radioactive water was leaking from tanks at Fukushima, the fifth and so far the worst, breach.

The water, stored in 1,000 tanks, is pumped into three damaged reactors to keep their melted fuel cool. Much of the water leaked into the ground but some may have escaped into the sea through a rain-water gutter.

On Aug. 28, the Nuclear Regulation Authority upgraded its rating of the leak to a “serious incident,” or level 3, up from a level 1 on the international scale of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It remains unclear what the environmental impact from the latest contamination will be on sea life.

Scientists have said contamination tends to be carried by a southward current and largely diluted as it spreads.

Nobuyuki Hatta, director of the Fukushima Prefecture Fisheries Research Center, said the trend had been positive before the latest leaks, with fewer fish found exceeding radiation limits.

The government’s safety limit is 100 becquerels per kilogram, but local officials have set a stricter bar of 50 becquerels, said Hatta, who still expects test fishing to resume in September.

It all depends on the type of fish, their habitat and what they eat. Out of 170 types of fish tested, 42 fish species are off limits due to concern they are too radioactive, another 15 species show little or no signs of contamination. Few, if any, show any detectable levels of cesium.

Tests take over a month and are complicated. The time lag makes it difficult to say at any given point if sea life caught off the Fukushima coast is really safe to eat.

Also, local labs lack the ability to test fish for other toxic elements such as strontium and tritium.

Scientists say strontium should be particularly watched for, as it accumulates in bones. TEPCO’s monitoring results of sea water show spikes in strontium levels in recent weeks.

Suzuki has little faith in the future of his business.

“People in the fishing business have no choice but to give up,” he said. “Many have mostly given up already.”

Fukushima fishermen halt test fishing over leaks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130828_41.html

Fishermen have decided to suspend test fishing off Fukushima Prefecture due to radioactive water leaks from a nearby damaged nuclear plant.

The decision was made on Wednesday at a meeting of about 60 representatives of 6 local fishery groups.

A senior executive of the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company, apologized for the repeated leaks of tainted water into the sea.

Local fishermen started test fishing off Soma, in the prefecture's north, in June last year to check radiation levels. The testing was aimed at a resumption of commercial fishing, which was halted after the 2011 nuclear crisis at the plant.

But the fishermen now say investigations into the leaks are still underway and countermeasures have yet

to be taken. They concluded that convincing consumers of the safety of fish from the area would be difficult.

Fishermen also planned to start test fishing off Iwaki, in the prefecture's south, next month. Participants at the meeting decided to postpone such testing for the same reason.

The representatives agreed to decide when to resume or start test fishing after assessing the leaks' effects until at least mid-September. They say they'll also consider radioactivity levels of local marine products.

Prefectural fisheries federation head Tetsu Nozaki expressed regret that a setback in cleanup work after the accident has hindered consumer understanding.

Fishermen disappointed and angry

August 29, 2013

Fishermen lash out at Tepco over toxic water

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/29/national/fishermen-lash-out-at-tepco-over-toxic-water/#.UiBFJX9Sb9k>

A national fishermen's organization on Thursday criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s management of the radioactive water accumulating at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and said the utility should act under government guidance to remedy the situation.

"Your company's radioactive water management has failed," the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations told Tepco President Naomi Hirose after it invited him to its office in Tokyo. "We want the problem to be fundamentally resolved as early as possible under the government's leadership."

Hirose apologized for the recently confirmed leak of highly toxic water from one of the huge storage tanks at Fukushima No. 1, some of which is believed to have reached the Pacific Ocean.

The federation urged the utility to put an end to problems stemming from the massive amount of radioactive water at the plant.

The federation said in its statement that local fishermen are "largely disappointed" by the escalating toxic water problem as they have been waiting to resume their operations.

On Wednesday, the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations decided to suspend "trial operations" off Fukushima.

Such trials limit the area of fishing and only allow shipment of products confirmed to be safe.

A fisheries cooperative covering the northern part of the prefecture has been conducting such an operation for more than a year, while another cooperative based in the southern part of the prefecture had planned to resume a similar operation in September.

However, Tepco admitted in July that contaminated groundwater was flowing from the nuclear complex into the sea area inside the breakwaters. It also found last week that a large amount — perhaps 300 tons — of highly toxic water had escaped from a storage tank.

The highly radioactive water had been used to cool the three reactors that suffered meltdowns in March 2011.

In Qatar on Wednesday, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said his administration will take charge of the efforts to contain the Fukushima No. 1 disaster, following revelations of the radioactive water leak from the storage tank.

"There is a need for the government to address the issue with a sense of urgency and not just leave it all up to Tokyo Electric Power Co.," he said.

Abe, who is in Qatar on the last leg of a trip to the Middle East and Africa, said the government will thoroughly disseminate to the people in Japan and abroad information about the containment effort.

In Tokyo on Wednesday, Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, said Tepco's inexact monitoring of contaminated water stored at Fukushima No. 1 may have led the utility to overstate last week's storage tank leak.

The loss of 300 metric tons that Tepco reported was based on an assumption that the tank had been full before the leak was discovered, Tanaka. That assumption may not have been reliable because there was no gauge measuring the tank's water level, he said.

"We have no idea whether it's actually 300 tons that leaked," Tanaka said. "We need to look into this issue more."

Tepco's management of the contaminated water at the crippled nuclear plant has already drawn fire from Shinji Kinjo, leader of a disaster task force at the NRA, who has said the utility was careless in its monitoring of the storage tanks and failed to keep records of its inspections.

Managing the water, which is increasing at a rate of 400 tons a day, is a fundamental challenge for Tepco as it struggles with the catastrophe.

Fishermen press TEPCO to end toxic water problem at Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130829p2g00m0dm092000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A national fishermen's organization on Thursday pressed Tokyo Electric Power Co. to ensure there will be no further leaks of radioactive water from its crippled nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

"Your company's radioactive water management has failed," the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations told TEPCO President Naomi Hirose after it summoned him to its office in Tokyo. Hirose apologized for the recently confirmed leak of highly toxic water at one of the huge water storage tanks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, some of which could have flown into the adjacent Pacific Ocean.

The federation urged the utility to put an end to problems stemming from the massive amount of radioactive water accumulating at the plant, saying, "We want the problem to be fundamentally resolved as early as possible under the state's leadership."

Hirose said the radioactive water issue is the "biggest business challenge" to the utility.

"We would like to make sure that we will no longer generate (public) concern as early as possible," he said.

The federation also said in the statement that local fishermen are "largely disappointed" by the escalating toxic water problem as they have been waiting to resume their fishing operations.

On Wednesday, the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations decided to suspend at the end of August so-called "trial" fisheries operations off the coast of Fukushima.

A trial operation limits the area of fishing and only allows shipment of products confirmed to be safe.

A fisheries cooperative covering the northern part of the prefecture has employed such an operation for more than a year, while another cooperative covering the southern part of the prefecture had planned to resume the operation from September.

But TEPCO admitted in July that contaminated groundwater was flowing from the nuclear complex into the sea area inside the breakwaters. It also found last week that 300 tons of highly toxic water had escaped from a storage tank.

TEPCO is struggling to manage radioactive water that is created as a result of continuing to inject water into the three reactors that suffered meltdowns during the crisis, triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Govt. urged to address contaminated water

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130829_34.html

Japanese fishermen have asked the government to take strong leadership in efforts to prevent further leaks of radioactive water at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The head of the national federation of fisheries cooperatives, Hiroshi Kishi, handed a letter of request to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on Thursday.

Local fishery cooperatives were due to resume experimental fishing off Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture in September, but they cancelled their plans. This is because 300 tons of highly radioactive water was found to have leaked from a storage tank at the plant, with some of the water feared to have flowed into sea.

The federation is asking the government to lead efforts to come up with fundamental measures to prevent further leaks.

It also is asking the government to take every step to help prevent the spread of negative rumors about the safety of marine products caught off Fukushima.

Suga said the government will soon create a new framework for preventing further leaks at the plant and will explain the system to the fishermen's group.

Kishi told reporters that the discovery of the leakage of contaminated water from the storage tank could not have come at a worse moment, and it has destroyed all the efforts of local fishermen to rebuild their industry.

Aug. 29, 2013 - Updated 09:02 UTC

Fishermen lodge protest with TEPCO on water leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130829_21.html

Japanese fishermen have lodged a protest with Tokyo Electric Power Company over leaking radioactive water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The chief of the national federation of fisheries cooperatives, Hiroshi Kishi, on Thursday summoned TEPCO President Naomi Hirose to his office.

TEPCO officials acknowledged earlier in August that several hundred tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from a storage tank at the Fukushima plant. They also said some of it may have seeped into the sea. They admitted in July that polluted groundwater was making its way to the ocean.

The leakage has forced local fishermen to stop offshore test-fishing activities. They were hoping to eventually resume commercial fishing.

Federation chief Kishi told Hirose that the problem of contaminated water has an immeasurable impact on the future of the fishing industry.

The TEPCO president apologized and said the leakage, on top of the groundwater problem, are things that never should have happened.

Hirose said his company will step up patrols at the plant to prevent further oversights, and will replace the current tanks with those that are more resistant to leaks.

The federation chief later said he expects the government to show leadership in dealing with the problem. Kishi said he thinks the utility has failed in its handling of the crisis.

Hirose said TEPCO, with the full support of the government, will swiftly put in place measures to prevent further leaks.

Aug. 29, 2013 - Updated 04:54 UTC

Dosimeters for Fukushima residents/returnees upon request

August 29, 2013

Environment Ministry giving out radiation dosimeters to Fukushima residents

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130829p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The Ministry of the Environment included the cost of providing radiation dosimeters to Fukushima residents returning to their hometowns in its budget request for fiscal 2014, it's been learned.

The ministry reported the budget request for next fiscal year to the New Komeito party's environmental council on Aug. 28. Of a total budget of 840.5 billion yen in the report, the figure included 2.7 billion yen for the distribution of small radiation dosimeters for residents in Fukushima Prefecture, who have been allowed to return to their hometowns after being forced to evacuate in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster.

The 2.7 billion yen budget also includes the cost for other projects such as for consultations with experts.

The government started to give out dosimeters to residents of the Miyakoji district in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, from Aug. 1 and will continue until the end of October, since the Miyakoji residents are now allowed to stay in their homes for up to three months.

The ministry aims to provide the device to about 34,000 residents of "areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" (radiation exposure doses of 20 millisieverts or less per year) in the prefecture upon their request.

Meanwhile, 326.2 billion yen is included in the budget request for decontamination work.

The ministry didn't specify the cost of building interim storage facilities that would store contaminated soil for 30 years as a site for the facilities hasn't been decided on yet.

Bus service to measure radiation

August 29, 2013

Buses help measure radiation levels in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130829_29.html

Busses running routes in Fukushima Prefecture are now helping residents track radiation levels in the air.

Buses servicing routes through 4 cities started carrying special equipment on Thursday to measure radioactivity from the 2011 nuclear accident.

Researchers at the Japan Atomic Energy Agency developed the system. The measurements are shown in real-time on a large monitor set up near JR Fukushima Station. The information is also available online.

The data is updated every 30 seconds. Areas with low levels are shown in blue. The color changes to green, then yellow as levels rise.

The data can be tracked back to January of this year, when researchers started trials.

A woman in her 60s from Fukushima City welcomed the monitoring system. She says she feels uneasy about changes in radiation levels on windy days.

Agency official Hiroshi Takemiya says he hopes the data will give people peace of mind.

New device to test radiation in food

August 31, 2013

New device tests food for radioactive content more efficiently

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308310040>

By TORU FURUSHO/ Staff Writer

ISHINOMAKI, Miyagi Prefecture--Researchers have developed a device that can determine radioactive content levels in fish and other food products without having to destroy them first in order to test them.

The device could prove a possible savior for fishermen and farmers who are suffering due to concern their produce may be contaminated by radioactive fallout from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Keizo Ishii, a professor of radiological engineering at Tohoku University, and his co-workers introduced their radioactive content detector Aug. 30 at the Ishinomaki Fish Market, where their new apparatus is on loan.

Workers at the market tested the new apparatus on cod, flounder and other fish.

"The new device will allow us to test each single fish and ensure that we are shipping safer products to consumers," said Kunio Suno, the 70-year-old president of the company that operates the fish market. "That could help stop falling fish prices, which have been hurt by harmful rumors (of contamination)."

The device, consisting of a 12-meter-long conveyor belt and sensors underneath, is configured to gauge the weight, size and radioactive content of food samples as they pass over. Thereafter, it automatically sorts the produce or fish by their radioactive content into three categories: up to 50 becquerels per kilogram; between 50-100 becquerels per kg and more than 100 becquerels per kg.

The device can test some 1,400 samples an hour, even if the products differ, the researchers said.

Central government guidelines and current testing methods require food samples to be pulverized, with the exception of rice, to get accurate radioactive content readings.

The Ishinomaki Fish Market will test its fish using both the conventional method and the new device until its use is approved by the central government.

Ishii said he hopes to further calibrate his contamination detector to make it even more precise and offer it to other food producers in need.

Limiting compensation

August 30, 2013

Gov't agency proposes limiting nuclear disaster aid to 33 Fukushima municipalities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130830p2a00m0na016000c.html>

A government agency is set to designate certain municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture eligible for special assistance relating to the ongoing nuclear crisis in a draft policy framework without establishing criteria based on radiation levels, it has been learned.

The latest revelations have sparked criticism that the basic implementation policy for the Victims Protection Act drawn up by the Reconstruction Agency unfairly limits the scope of assistance the government will be required to provide.

Out of municipalities in eastern Fukushima Prefecture recognized as "areas with significant levels of radiation following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster," the policy draft identifies 33 municipalities -- with the exception of exclusion zones and their surrounding environs -- as qualifying for assistance. As for the content of the "assistance," the agency states it will consider expanding the assistance package that it announced in March.

Meanwhile, western Fukushima Prefecture's Aizu region and surrounding prefectures will be given secondary eligibility for assistance, including external radiation exposure surveys using personal dosimeters.

According to the Victims Protection Law, the maximum permissible amount of radiation exposure per year for the general public is 1 millisievert. If this criterion is applied to air dose levels -- a widely used index since the nuclear disaster broke out -- in determining victim aid eligibility, areas outside of Fukushima Prefecture would qualify. As there are radiation hotspots in neighboring prefectures, limiting victim aid to within Fukushima prefectural boundaries is bound to draw protest.

The final deadline for applications for private housing rent subsidies, provided under the Disaster Relief Act to disaster victims who evacuated out of Fukushima Prefecture, came and went late last year. Some have called for the government to revive rent subsidies under the Victims Protection Act, but such a program has not been included in the Reconstruction Agency's basic policy draft.

At the behest of the Reconstruction Agency, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) on Aug. 28 set up an expert panel, which has begun to collect data through related ministries and agencies on individual radiation dose levels in aid-eligible areas. Individual dose levels are inclined to be lower than air dose levels, and the government is believed to be counting on this tendency to encourage residents to return to their hometowns, as well as to secure scientific back-up for their method for deciding aid-eligibility.

The lawmaker-initiated Victims Protection Act was enacted in June 2012. It limits assistance qualification to areas with at least a certain level of annual cumulative radiation doses as a result of the nuclear disaster, but below 20 millisieverts -- the level at which the national government's exclusion zone designation is lifted.

However, it has proven difficult to achieve consistency between the legislation and radiation exposure limits for the general public. **Because there is a possibility that the number of evacuees will increase depending on the cut-off line for radiation levels the government will set, the Reconstruction Agency had heretofore postponed the creation of a basic implementation framework.**

Residents in Fukushima Prefecture and elsewhere filed a suit at the Tokyo District Court earlier this month demanding that the agency compile a draft policy framework to fully enforce the law, which has been stalled for some 14 months.

Govt. drafts plan to support Fukushima residents

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130830_35.html

The Japanese government has drawn up a draft plan to provide support for people affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The draft announced on Friday is based on a law extending support to affected children and adults.

The law was enacted in June last year. It mandates medical, housing and other support to current and former residents of areas where radioactive levels are at high levels.

But the government had not drawn up a basic plan that included clear support for residents and areas designated as evacuation zones.

The draft plan covers 33 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. People in these areas will be able to receive comprehensive support for education and other matters.

The government says it chose the municipalities because they have been exposed to certain levels of radiation since the nuclear accident. But the plan does not set a standard for exposure.

Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto told reporters on Friday the government thought that setting a standard would divide local communities.

Nemoto said the government wants to solicit public opinions and hold a briefing in Fukushima before finalizing the plan.

A group of evacuees and residents of Fukushima are criticizing the government's draft plan for providing them only limited support.

The group told reporters on Friday that radioactive materials from the nuclear accident have also been spreading to areas outside the 33 designated municipalities.

Members of the group say the government never held public hearings before drawing up the plan.

They also say the plan provides little support for people who have taken refuge outside the prefecture.

Kazuko Nihei evacuated to Tokyo on a voluntary basis. She says she is disappointed because **the plan only includes measures to urge people to return to Fukushima.**

She says she wants to ask the government to give more support to people such as her who prefer to remain outside the prefecture.

Victim support plan finalised

August 31, 2013

Government finally decides on basic policy to help Fukushima victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201308310052>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The central government has finalized its basic policy for providing support to those affected by the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The state minister in charge of reconstruction, Takumi Nemoto, announced the measures Aug. 30.

Under the basic policy, 33 municipalities in eastern and central Fukushima Prefecture will be designated as eligible for support measures. All the areas approved recorded high radiation levels soon after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

While some disaster victims hailed the announcement as an important first step, others questioned why the government's plan does not cover individuals outside Fukushima Prefecture.

Both houses of the Diet originally passed the law providing support to victims of the disaster in June 2012, but the central government did not put together a basic policy that included specific measures to implement the law until now.

That led to the filing of a lawsuit earlier this month by some victims who were fed up with the government's lack of action.

In the areas designated eligible for state-funded support, the central government plans to construct medical facilities and implement measures to support children attending school.

And despite criticism of the basic policy, it does actually leave open the possibility that those who moved outside of Fukushima due to the disaster may become eligible for some assistance as well.

One individual who said the basic policy was an important first step was Takeshi Murakami, 37, who evacuated from Fukushima city to Niigata city. "I hope the government provides realistic support that meets the needs of individual evacuees," he said.

One group of disaster victims that lobbied the central government for aid also praised some of the measures in the new policy, particularly the decision to allow private-sector organizations to provide support to evacuees and the securing of staff to conduct thyroid testing for children.

However, not all had praise for the new measures: Tokiko Noguchi, who was among the plaintiffs who filed the lawsuit against the central government over the delay in providing timely relief, criticized the fact that the entire prefecture of Fukushima was not deemed eligible for assistance.

There was also criticism that areas outside of Fukushima Prefecture that registered high radiation readings were not included in the basic policy despite the minister in charge of reconstruction giving his assurance that necessary measures would be implemented if officials felt there was a need.

In February, nine cities in northwestern Chiba Prefecture jointly submitted a request to the Reconstruction Agency asking that it implement measures to better manage the health of residents. Officials from those municipalities were puzzled at the fact that their cities were not designated as being eligible for the support measures passed by the Diet.

The cities plan to further study the government's basic policy before deciding what course of action they will next take.

The government's new policy also states that a panel of experts will consider what health management measures for residents should be implemented for prefectures neighboring Fukushima

see previous articles (August 30, 2013)

Gov't will help with evacuation plans

September 1, 2013

Govt. to help craft local nuclear evacuation plans

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130902_05.html

The Japanese government will form consultative groups of ministry and agency officials to help municipalities draw up evacuation plans for nuclear accidents.

Following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March, 2011, 156 municipalities within 30 kilometers of a nuclear plant around the nation have been overhauling their evacuation plans in the event of nuclear accidents.

But the reviewing process has stalled due to difficulties in making arrangements between local

governments.

The main issues include evacuations beyond prefectural borders and the transport of elderly patients from hospitals and nursing care facilities.

The central government has so far left the work of crafting evacuation plans to municipalities, claiming the task is their duty.

But the government reversed its position and decided to set up consultative councils to give the state a leadership role in solving problems facing municipalities.

Officials from relevant ministries and agencies will be a part in the new groups to be established in each region hosting a nuclear plant.

Among the tasks of the consultative bodies is finalizing which local governments will accept evacuees from other prefectures.

They will also help secure means of transport for elderly people and inpatients, as well as gain cooperation from people on giving assistance to the vulnerable.

The government plans to officially decide to launch the new bodies as early as Tuesday in a meeting on nuclear disaster preparedness.

The Fukushima crisis triggered chaos in the evacuation process. Some pre-determined evacuation sites were unavailable as the nuclear accident required the evacuation of residents from areas wider than the government had predicted. Many elderly bed-ridden hospital patients died after lengthy evacuations by bus.

The government regards mapping out evacuation plans as equally crucial as safeguarding nuclear plants based on new guidelines for the safety of nuclear stations.

Attention is focused on how the new bodies will overcome a host of challenges in evacuating people to allay local concerns.

SPEEDI or not SPEEDI?

September 3, 2013

Panel urges SPEEDI use in nuclear emergency

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130903_19.html

An accident investigation committee says the Japanese government's system for predicting the spread of radiation may have helped the evacuation of residents.

More than 40 Atomic Energy Society of Japan experts have been examining the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident that occurred on March 11, 2011.

They have been analyzing data provided by Tokyo Electric Power Company and reports by the government and the Diet.

The panel said the government's decision not to use the SPEEDI system at the onset of the accident was appropriate. It says not enough information about the source of radiation was available at the time.

Atomic energy experts said, however, that the system may have been useful in choosing appropriate evacuation routes if necessary data had been available.

The panel concluded that better use of the system should be considered in the event of a similar accident.

The results supported a government committee investigating the accident that also concluded the SPEEDI system may have been useful.

However, an investigation committee appointed by the Diet concluded that SPEEDI forecasts are not accurate enough to be used for planning evacuation routes.

Sep. 3, 2013 - Updated 04:02 UTC

UNEP honors Katsurao Mayor

September 3, 2013

Mayor in Fukushima honored for disaster response

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130903_15.html

The UN Environment Programme and others have honored the mayor of a village in Fukushima Prefecture for his role in evacuating local residents right after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in March 2011.

Katsurao Mayor Masahide Matsumoto received a Green Star Award in Geneva on Monday.

He was recognized for taking the initiative to lead the immediate evacuation of about 1,600 villagers, saving them from being exposed to radiation. Their community is about 25 kilometers from the damaged nuclear plant.

The biennial awards are a joint initiative between the UNEP, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Green Cross International.

They recognize outstanding efforts to reduce the environmental and humanitarian impacts of disasters and conflicts.

Speaking at the award ceremony, Matsumoto recalled that the evacuation of all the residents was a daunting task without any working communication lines. He said many of the people are still forced to live in temporary housing, but he will work to enable their return home.

He told an NHK correspondent that he hopes to use the award to accelerate efforts for reconstruction.

Fishermen's frustration

September 4, 2013

Fukushima fishermen losing hope as trial operations postponed

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309040053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--With a series of leaks of radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, fishermen such as Yoshinori Yamazaki are feeling frustrated after being forced to postpone trial operations scheduled to start in September.

Yamazaki, 45, who lives in Soma, about 40 kilometers north of the plant, said time is being wasted as he cannot go to sea with his father Matsuo, 71, and his 23-year-old eldest son.

Before the Great East Japan Earthquake struck in March 2011, the three generations of his family went fishing together.

Matsuo had been excited about his grandson joining in the family tradition.

“We (the family) were doing as well as anyone else,” Yamazaki said. “How many valuable years do we have to lose?”

The city’s Matsukawaura Port had boasted one of the largest fisheries hauls in the Tohoku region before the disaster. For many working at the port, fishing is a family business, with a number of teenagers and those in their 20s deciding to take up the trade each year.

Throughout the season, more than 100 species are caught in the waters off the port. In the morning, the fish market was crowded with the wives of fishermen helping sort the day's catch.

But the port was devastated by the tsunami, which followed the earthquake on March 11, 2011, and killed 101 members of the Soma-Futaba fishing cooperative association.

In an effort to bounce back from the earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear plant accident, the association started test operations in June 2012 for "mizudako" (North Pacific giant octopus) and two other species.

Conducting monitoring inspections, the association repeatedly checked samples to confirm safety of the catches.

Association members originally planned to triple the fishing grounds and increase the catch to 16 varieties when the trial operation resumed in September.

Yamazaki was well prepared for fishing for whitebait, a new species that was scheduled to be added in September. The fish, which brings high prices, is a lucrative catch for fishermen.

Fish detectors were showing large schools of whitebait, which have increased in number during the past years of suspension of fishing operations.

Yamazaki bought new fishing equipment, costing about 2 million yen (\$20,000), to replace the gear that had been washed away in the tsunami.

The announcement by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima nuclear power plant, that highly radioactive water has been leaking at the Fukushima No. 1 plant came during such preparation.

Following the March 2011 earthquake, his son obtained a license as a heavy truck driver and a heavy machinery operator. Yamazaki has told him to wait "until things get better."

"I cannot keep him from leaving home forever," Yamazaki said. "This coast will be no more if young people are gone."

His mother, then 65, who supported the family's fishing operations, was killed in the tsunami while Matsuo piloted his boat to safety in waters off Soma immediately after the earthquake.

“Even three years after the disaster, I cannot operate the boat I had protected in exchange for my wife’s life,” Matsuo lamented. “It doesn’t seem right that I saved the boat.”

Nobuo Shishido, president of the Soma-based supermarket Super Shishido, has also been discouraged by lagging sales apparently due to media coverage about the contaminated water leaking into the ocean.

“Last summer, 10 times more octopus, caught during the trial fishing period, were sold than this year,” Shishido said. “Even if I want to sell, consumers do not respond.”

Of about 200 kilograms of octopus caught in Fukushima waters and stocked in early August, half have been left unsold.

According to the Soma-Futaba fishing cooperative association, octopus caught during the trial fishing period had been shipped to Tokyo and Nagoya. But wholesalers in Nagoya stopped accepting the octopus in late July, a week after TEPCO announced a leak of radioactive water.

Hiroyuki Sato, who heads the association, has also felt frustrated.

“Products we monitored and found to be safe have been given the cold shoulder (by our customers),” Sato, 57, said. “We have done many things until now, but we are right back where we started.”

Fukushima Prefecture has been monitoring radiation levels of fish since April 2011. The levels have shown recovery from the measurements taken immediately after the accident.

The prefecture measures weekly radiation levels of about 150 fish samples at about 40 locations in the waters off Fukushima Prefecture, except the area within a 5-km radius of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant.

In recent months, radiation levels have been at less than the detection limit of around 16 becquerels per kilogram for most species, such as flatfish, marbled flounder and whitebait.

According to the prefecture's marine products division, the fisheries haul in coastal waters totaled only 122 tons in 2012, when Soma-Futaba started the trial operation, compared with about 26,000 tons, worth about 9 billion yen, each year before the 2011 disaster.

This year saw improvement, with a total of 386 tons of fish caught during trial operations while the concentration of cesium did not exceed the safety limit at many locations off the prefecture.

Aside from the Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association, the Iwaki fisheries cooperative, based in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, south of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, planned to launch a test operation in September for the first time since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

(This article was compiled from reports by Takayuki Kihara, Takemichi Nishibori and Shinichi Fujiwara.)

September 3, 2013

Fukushima fishermen criticize govt. and TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130903_44.html

Fishermen in Fukushima Prefecture have criticized plans by the government and the operator of the disabled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to deal with the ongoing leakage of radioactive groundwater into the sea.

About 100 fishermen attended a briefing on Tuesday in Soma City in Fukushima Prefecture. The meeting was organized by the industry ministry and Tokyo Electric Power Company.

A senior ministry official, Koichi Noda, explained a plan to create a water-shielding wall by freezing the soil around the damaged reactor buildings to prevent groundwater from flowing in and becoming contaminated. Noda said the government will shoulder the full cost of the necessary measures.

He added that the government and TEPCO will assess the possible risks in advance and they intend to deal with them properly.

TEPCO Managing Executive Officer Tsunemasa Niitsuma explained a plan to pump up and flush groundwater into the sea before it becomes contaminated.

Some fishermen asked how TEPCO will dispose of contaminated water temporarily kept in storage tanks in the plant's compound. Others said they understand the need to release groundwater into the ocean before it becomes contaminated but they fear the spread of negative rumors.

The head of a fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture, Hiroyuki Sato, said they should not decide whether to allow the release of water at this stage.

Google Street View in Fukushima

September 54, 2013

Google Street View goes inside Fukushima evacuation zones

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201309050069

By MIHO TANAKA/ Staff Writer

Former residents, via Google's Street View, can now virtually visit areas in Fukushima Prefecture that were devastated by the nuclear disaster.

Google Japan Inc. released the images, which give viewers a 360-degree perspective, on Sept. 4.

The areas include eight municipalities in the Hamadori district of eastern Fukushima, most of which lie within zones that were evacuated due to the reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The front gate of the Fukushima facility stretching from the towns of Okuma and Futaba is also visible in the images.

Google Japan said it had received many requests from disaster victims, who have been forced to evacuate outside the areas, to show the current state of their hometowns.

With the help of local governments, the areas in the eight municipalities were photographed from April to August for the first time since the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear accident, according to the company.

It also updated images of areas in 17 municipalities in coastal areas of Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures, which were originally taken between July 2011 and January 2012, to new ones photographed around the same time as those in Fukushima Prefecture.

September 4, 2013

Google offers images around Fukushima Daiichi

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130904_28.html

Google has released recent images of areas around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant where access is still restricted due to high radiation levels.

The Internet giant's street view service has been offering photos of areas in northeastern Japan that were devastated by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The images released on Wednesday were taken from April until last month in areas including the towns of Futaba and Okuma near the plant.

The photos show debris scattered all around, and areas in need of reconstruction nearly 30 months since the disaster.

Residency in most of both towns is restricted indefinitely. Town officials gave Google permission to take the photos.

Images of coastal areas in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures were also added.

Viewers now can see images of the areas from before and right after the disaster as well as those taken recently.

Sep. 4, 2013 - Updated 08:47 UTC

Fishermen, mayos beg Gov't to handle leak

September 6, 2013

Fishermen urge govt. to stop Fukushima leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130906_32.html

Japan's fishing industry has urged the government to act immediately to stop leakage of radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The head of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, Hiroshi Kishi, delivered a petition to Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Friday.

Kishi was joined by representatives of fisheries cooperatives from Fukushima and neighboring Miyagi prefectures. They also asked the ministry to safely manage the plant's radioactive water.

Motegi said the government has pledged roughly 470-million dollars to stop the leakage.

He said the government will lead efforts to quickly contain the problem, and hopes to restore an environment that allows fishermen to feel at ease as soon as possible.

Kishi also expressed serious concern about a South Korean blanket ban on imports of marine products from Fukushima and 7 other prefectures. He asked the government to make sure it spreads information properly.

Mayors ask govt. to handle Fukushima leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130906_37.html

A group of mayors in Fukushima Prefecture has asked Japan's government to do more to stop radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The four mayors of municipalities near the plant made the request to industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Friday.

Naraha Town Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto urged Motegi to step up monitoring of what the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, is doing to prevent more leaks.

Matsumoto also asked that the central government explain to local residents how efforts to stop the leaks are going and the risks presented by trouble at the plant.

Motegi replied that the government will no longer leave the leakage problem up to the plant operator, and will step in to speed up efforts.

He acknowledged that the government was slow to disclose information about the crippled plant, making people more concerned.

Motegi added that authorities will try to create a system to quickly provide information to people in and outside Japan.

South Korea bans marine products from NE Japan

September 6, 2013

S. Korea bans fishery imports due to radioactive water leak on eve of Olympic vote

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201309060089

The South Korean government on Sept. 6 announced a fisheries ban on eight Japanese prefectures due to concerns over leaks of radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, on the eve of a crucial vote to host the 2020 Summer Olympics.

A senior official at the Tokyo metropolitan government said the negative publicity generated by the ban may affect its bid to host the Games, which will be voted on Sept. 7 by the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires.

“Now is a very bad time,” the official said. “I am worried that the intense attention by overseas media could affect our effort for bidding.”

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference on Sept. 6 that contaminated water that leaked into the sea from the Fukushima plant remains within the bay surrounding the plant, and the radiation levels are far below those permitted. He said Seoul should “react based on scientific evidence.”

The fisheries industry in the affected prefectures are concerned about how publicity from the ban will affect their livelihoods. The eight prefectures are Fukushima, Ibaraki, Gunma, Miyagi, Iwate, Tochigi, Chiba and Aomori, the South Korean government said.

The South Korean government said on Sept. 6 that it will extend the ban on 50 fisheries products at present to all fisheries products from those prefectures starting Sept. 9. South Korea imported about 40,000 tons of fisheries products from Japan in 2012, with some 5,000 tons coming from the eight prefectures.

In terms of fisheries products from other prefectures, the South Korean government decided it will request an export inspection certificate for additional radioactive substances when even a small amount of radioactive cesium is detected.

“Fisheries products from which any radioactivity is detected will be effectively blocked,” a South Korean government source said.

The government cited as reasons the sharp increase in concern among the South Korean public about the flow of contaminated water into the sea, and that the information the Japanese government has provided so far is not sufficient to predict future developments.

South Korean media have reported daily about the leakage of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant, which has begun to affect consumption of fisheries products at home and sales of fishery products imported from Japan.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, such countries as South Korea, China, Russia, the United States and the European Union have restricted imports of seafood products following the accident at the Fukushima nuclear plant, which started in March 2011. While many countries enacted a blanket ban immediately after the accident, New Zealand, Canada and Malaysia completely lifted the ban between June 2011 and March this year. The United States also lifted the ban on the condition that it can inspect imported fisheries. The EU also eased restrictions in October 2012 by decreasing the number of target prefectures.

On the other hand, as of the end of July, China continued to ban fisheries products, regardless of radiation levels, from 10 prefectures, including Fukushima, Miyagi and Chiba. China demands submission of the Japanese government's inspection certificate and certificates of origin.

South Korea's latest decision came as a surprise and a concern to government officials and those in the fisheries industry.

"I don't know why it was decided now," said a senior official at the Fisheries Agency. "It has been a while since the contaminated water problem was found. Tokyo Electric Power Co. (the operator of the Fukushima plant) admitted to the leaks a month ago. We are now collecting information as to when the import ban takes effect."

The agency has not received any information about Seoul's ban.

Shinetsu Kikuchi, president of the Miyagi prefectural federation of fisheries cooperative associations, was outraged.

"This is a disaster," he said. "It is a result of the government's measures (against radioactive water leaks) that are always late. I hope the government makes its utmost effort to rescue fishermen. I hope the ban will not lead to a boycott campaign among Japanese consumers."

An official at Miyagi prefectural government's fisheries promotion division said, "While the amount of (fisheries product) exported to South Korea is not great, I am worried false rumors will spread."

Hiroyuki Sato, president of the Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association in Fukushima Prefecture, points out the political implications behind Seoul's move.

"This seems to be a problem of politics, not fisheries," Sato said. "I cannot help thinking the difficult relationship such as the shared history between Japan and South Korea is behind the ban."

(Seiko Sadakuni in Tokyo and Akihiko Kaise in Seoul contributed to this article.)

S. Korea bans fish from NE Japan on radiation fears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130906p2g00m0dm041000c.html>

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) -- South Korea announced Friday that it was banning all fish imports from along Japan's northeastern coast because of what officials called growing public worry over radioactive water leaking into the Pacific Ocean near the crippled Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant.

Fisheries in Fukushima prefecture (state) are closed, and fish caught in nearby prefectures are sold on the market only after tests have shown them to be safe for consumption.

However, South Korea's ban applies a total of eight prefectures with a combined coastline of more than 700 kilometers (430 miles), regardless of whether the fish pass safety standards or not.

The South Korean government made the move because of insufficient information from Tokyo about what steps will be taken to address the leakage of contaminated water from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, according to a statement by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant's operator, acknowledges that tons of radioactive water has been seeping into the Pacific from the plant for more than two years after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami led to meltdowns at three reactors at the plant. Recent leaks from tanks storing radioactive water used to cool the reactors have added to fears that the amount of contaminated water is getting out of hand.

Japan's chief Cabinet secretary, Yoshihide Suga, said Friday that fish and seafood that go to market are tested for radiation and shown to be safe. Suga also stressed that the contaminated water flowing into the ocean is limited to a small area off the coast of the Fukushima plant.

"There is an international standard on food, including fish, and we are carrying out stringent safety controls based on those standards. We ask South Korea for a response based on science," he told reporters.

South Korea Vice Fisheries Minister Son Jae-hak said in a briefing that the eight prefectures in 2012 exported to South Korea 5,000 metric tons of fishery products, or about 13 percent of the 40,000 total tons imported last year from Japan. Fish will be banned from the following prefectures: Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Gunma, Tochigi and Chiba.

Hisashi Hiroyama, a Japanese Fisheries Agency official, said Japan exports about 9.2 billion (\$92 million) of fish a year to South Korea. The most common fish exported from Japan to South Korea was Alaskan Pollock.

Scientists have long believed that contaminated water was reaching the ocean, based in part on continuing high levels of radioactive cesium found in fish living at the bottom of the sea. Scientists have also noted a rise in strontium-90 and tritium levels in the past few months. Strontium accumulates in fish bones and remains longer than cesium in fish and the humans that eat them.

Hiroshi Kishi, chairman of the Japan Fisheries Cooperatives, called on Energy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi Friday morning to tackle the contamination issue as soon as possible, and to release appropriate information to international community to avoid the further negative groundless reputation over Japan fishery products.

"This is a structurally difficult and complex issue. We will not rely on TEPCO, but the government will come to the forefront in resolving the issue," Motegi said.

Earlier this week, the Japanese government announced that it would spend 47 billion yen (\$470 million) to build an underground "ice wall" around the reactor and turbine buildings and develop an advanced water treatment system in an attempt to contain the leaks and limit the amount of contaminated water.

Seoul bans fish imports from eight prefectures

Kyodo, staff report

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/06/national/south-korea-bans-fishery-imports-from-eight-prefectures-on-radiation-fears/#.UintTn9Sb9k>

SEOUL – South Korea announced Friday it has placed an import ban on all fisheries products from eight Japanese prefectures deemed effected by radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The decision was made earlier Friday after a meeting between government agencies chaired by Prime Minister Chung Hong-won and the ruling party.

According to officials, all fishery products from radiation-affected regions in Japan will be banned from entering South Korea regardless of the levels of contamination. The ban covers products from Fukushima, Aomori, Ibaraki, Gunma, Miyagi, Iwate, Tochigi and Chiba prefectures.

“The measure comes as our people’s concerns are growing over the fact that hundreds of tons of radiation contaminated water are leaked daily from the site of Japan’s nuclear accident in Fukushima,” the South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries said in a press release, according to Yonhap news agency.

Tokyo responded Friday by saying Japan has stringent food safety standards based on international rules and regularly checks radiation levels. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga urged Seoul to “take actions based on scientific grounds,” stressing Japan is “strictly controlling safety” of fishery products based on international radiation standards.

The South Korean government said it will request additional radiation tests from Japan, if “even a minuscule dose of radioactive material, such as cesium or iodine, is detected in any products from any other region of Japan,” Yonhap reported.

The government also decided to lower the allowed dose of radiation in fisheries products from the current 370 becquerels per kilogram to 100 Bq/kg.

Yonhap quoted the ministry as saying the measures come “as the government concluded that it is unclear how the incident in Japan will progress in the future and that the information the Japanese government has provided so far is not enough to predict future developments.”

South Korea last year imported 5,000 tons of fishery products from the eight affected prefectures, out of a total of 40,000 tons of imports from Japan.

S.Korea bans marine products from eastern Japan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130906_20.html

South Korea has decided to ban imports of marine products from 8 eastern Japan prefectures, because of the leaks of tainted water at the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant.

The South Korean government announced on Friday that the ban will take effect on Monday.

Officials say they are responding to consumers' growing concerns about radioactive contamination in Japan.

The officials say the ban applies to all marine products from the 8 prefectures, regardless of whether radioactive materials are detected in them.

The 8 prefectures are Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, Aomori, Chiba, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma.

The officials also say the country will ask for test certificates if even a trace of radioactivity is found in fish, dairy products and other foods from anywhere in Japan.

They point out that it's difficult to assess the contamination by only using the data supplied by the Japanese government.

Immediately after the 2011 disaster, South Korea banned imports of Japanese marine products found to contain certain levels of radioactive substances.

But South Korean consumers are even avoiding marine products from their own country now because of fears over the tainted water leaks.

Fishermen worried bout Korean ban

September 6, 2013

Fishing industry worried about S.Korean import ban

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130906_44.html

Fishing industry officials in a city in Miyagi Prefecture say they're concerned about South Korea's blanket ban on marine products from 8 prefectures in Japan, including Miyagi.

South Korea announced the ban because of concerns regarding radioactive water that's leaking from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The officials are based in the city of Ishinomaki, about 110 kilometers from the plant.

One of them said he regrets the South Korean ban.

He said **the leakage of radioactive water from the nuclear plant into the sea is a problem not just for Fukushima and the surrounding region.**

He explained **it's an issue for Japan as a whole when looked at from abroad.**

He said the government should do more to address such concerns.

The head of a local fisheries cooperative said the ban came just as the organization was going to expand exports of processed fish products.

Tsunami boat returned to Japan

September 7, 2013

Japanese tsunami boat that hit U.S. going home

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201309070025

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CRESCENT CITY, California--A barnacle-covered fishing boat that was confirmed as the first debris from the 2011 tsunami in Japan to reach California's shores is returning home.

The Del Norte Triplicate reports that the boat is scheduled to leave from the San Francisco Bay Area for Japan by ship on Sept. 16. Free transportation is being provided by the shipping company, Yamato Transport.

The 6-meter boat washed up in Crescent City in California on April 7.

It belongs to a high school in the city of Rikuzentakata, which was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami.

Del Norte County Sheriff's Office Commander Bill Steven helped with the arrangements to get the boat back to Japan. He said its return, though right, was bittersweet since people in Crescent City had become attached to it.

"Joy and discontent"

September 8, 2013

Fukushima wants govt. to do more

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130908_19.html

Fukushima residents affected by the nuclear crisis have expressed both joy and discontent over the choice of Tokyo for the 2020 Olympic Games.

The nuclear disaster in March 2011 is still keeping nearly 150,000 people away from their homes due to a high level of radiation.

A woman in her 40s in Fukushima City said it is good that Tokyo won the Olympic bid. But she said she felt unhappy at hearing someone say "The Olympics site is far from Fukushima" to explain Tokyo's safety.

She is worried about repeated reports of radioactive waste water leaks from the crippled nuclear plant.

She stressed that the government should solve the issue as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told the international community that the incident is under control.

Another woman in her 70s said she is very excited about Tokyo's hosting the Games and she wants to be at the opening ceremony with her family members. She lives apart from the rest of her family in a temporary shelter after being evacuated from a town near the plant.

A man in his 60s said he doesn't think people have a clear image of what will happen in the next 7 years given current circumstances. He said the government should address the nuclear crisis responsibly and try to improve evacuees' lives first rather than prepare for the Olympics.

Impact of N. Korean ban

September 7, 2013

South Korean ban on Japanese seafood imports could hurt fisheries industry as a whole

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309070044>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A decision by the South Korean government on Sept. 6 to ban Japanese seafood imports from eight prefectures could possibly gut an already ailing fisheries industry and sink plans by the government to double exports by 2020.

Hiroshi Kishi, head of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, expressed his concerns in a meeting on Sept. 6 with Toshimitsu Motegi, the minister of economy, trade and industry. Kishi initially requested the meeting to ask Motegi to call on the government to take every measure possible to deal with the problem of radiation-contaminated water leaking from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The South Korean government announced its ban on Japanese seafood imports just before the meeting, casting an even larger cloud over the future of the Japanese fisheries industry.

Seoul was forced to halt imports due to increasingly strong public concerns about contaminated water flowing into the ocean off the Fukushima coast.

The South Korean media has been giving major coverage to the issue on a daily basis. Meanwhile, rumors have spread over the Internet about the discovery of strange looking fish and suspicions that Japanese fish are being falsely labeled as being from South Korea or Russia.

Citizens groups in South Korea had been calling on the government to take action. Criticism has also been raised against Japan, with deep mistrust over whether Japan is disclosing all information about the contaminated water.

Such concerns have even spread to the South Korean fisheries industry. Business at the Noryangjin Fish Market in Seoul has been hurt by a sharp decrease in sales of Alaska pollock, which is mainly imported from Japan. In late August, auction prices had fallen to about one-fourth the level of the same period last year. Domestic seafood sales have also suffered.

Conversely, seafood caught off the coast of Africa has increased in popularity.

One diplomatic source in Seoul said, "If nothing was done, criticism would have been directed at the South Korean government. It likely believed there was a need to placate the public by taking serious measures."

South Korea has been a major export market for Japanese fishermen.

Alaska pollock and scallops caught off Hokkaido and the Tohoku region are popular in South Korea. Before the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011, annual exports reached about 20 billion yen (\$201 million). However, that figure dropped by more than half to 9.2 billion yen in 2012.

A joint effort by the public and private sectors to increase exports had been proceeding when the latest South Korean government decision was made.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has asked Seoul to retract the decision, with a high-ranking ministry official saying, "The South Korean decision lacks an internationally accepted scientific basis."

While Japan could submit the case to the World Trade Organization or the International Court of Justice, such moves would likely only further aggravate the already strained ties between the two nations.

At the same time, if South Korea's position does not change and such moves spread to other nations, that would represent a major blow to Japan's fisheries industry.

Prefectures in the Tohoku region have established brand seafood products such as shark fin, oysters, and abalone that are exported to various nations.

In August, the farm ministry compiled a plan to double the exports of food and agricultural products to about 1 trillion yen by 2020. The plan included a goal of doubling seafood exports from the current 170 billion yen a year to 350 billion yen.

At a Sept. 6 news conference, Yoshimasa Hayashi, the farm minister, said: "To prevent concerns from spreading to other nations, the entire central government will become involved in dealing with the contaminated water problem. We will also transmit the results of what we have done."

Some of the prefectures directly affected by the South Korean ban had already been hurt even before the decision was made.

While exports of seafood from the two major fishing ports in Miyagi Prefecture totaled about 9,000 tons in 2010, the figure dropped to about 3,000 tons in 2012, the year after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. However, the figure for the first seven months of this year had reached 2,000 tons.

Exports of scallops resumed last autumn, but ever since reports surfaced about contaminated water off the Fukushima coast, it became more difficult to sell scallops to South Korea.

Seafood exports match those of apples in Aomori Prefecture. In 2011, a total of about 200 million yen for just scallops and squid were exported to South Korea. All the seafood has gone through testing for radioactive materials, and so far only Pacific cod has been found to exceed government standards. However, the ban on Pacific cod exports was also lifted after its radioactivity levels decreased.

Aomori Governor Shingo Mimura expressed confidence in being able to continue to show safe levels of radioactivity.

A major reason for the concerns about contaminated water is the huge amount of highly radioactive water that flowed in the ocean in the months immediately after the Fukushima nuclear accident. The amount of water was about 350 times the total of what flowed into the ocean subsequently. That is believed to be the main reason radioactivity levels exceeding national standards were detected off the coast of Fukushima at that time.

However, a Fisheries Agency official said, "There have been no recent reports of a sharp increase in detection levels. There have been no immediate effects on marine life."

Still, there are concerns about the effects of negative publicity.

Iwate Prefecture exports Alaska pollock and Pacific saury. An official at the prefectural government said it would be difficult to avoid negative effects from the recent reports about contaminated water.

Concerning how to get rid of negative publicity, Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato said: "We are conducting strict inspections and only safe products are going to the market. Providing accurate information will lead to eliminating (negative publicity)."

(This article was compiled from reports by Akihiko Kaise in Seoul and Yuriko Suzuki and Masanobu Furuya in Tokyo.)

So does the world

September 8, 2013

Fukushima wants govt. to do more

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130908_19.html

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Sep. 8, 2013 - Updated 05:25 UTC

Why is no one held responsible?

September 10, 2013

Fukushima victims angered at decision not to prosecute officials

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309100060>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Survivors of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident expressed disappointment and anger at the announcement Sept. 9 by the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office that it will not seek to indict any high-ranking government or Tokyo Electric Power Co. officials connected with the meltdown.

Hiroyuki Kawai, the lead lawyer for a group of about 15,000 disaster victims and others who submitted criminal complaints against officials in the government and TEPCO, the plant operator, criticized the decision.

"How can they say they conducted a thorough investigation when they did not carry out any raids on relevant offices?" Kawai asked. The group was seeking professional negligence resulting in death and injury and other charges against 42 officials.

"From the very beginning, it was not an investigation seeking indictments, but rather, one conducted so no indictments would be handed down," the lawyer said.

Journalist Soichiro Tawara also questioned the decision by prosecutors not to carry out raids on TEPCO offices to dig up evidence.

"As long as there is the possibility that new evidence could emerge, such raids should have been carried out and a decision should only have been made after all the evidence was examined," he said. "It cannot be claimed a thorough investigation was conducted."

Yasuyuki Takai, a lawyer who once worked as a prosecutor, explained the decision. He said there were high barriers to proving responsibility for the accident. He added that the problem lay in the Criminal Code that emphasizes punishing only individuals responsible for accidents.

"For cases like the Fukushima nuclear accident, priority should be given to prevention," Takai said. "A new structure is needed that would target companies as subject to punishment, which could be facilitated by granting immunity from criminal responsibility to individuals in a bid to dig up the truth."

Criticism was also directed at the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office, which had transferred the cases to the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office before the decision was made to not indict anyone.

Kawai said his group had wanted to submit a case to the Fukushima prosecution inquest panel so that residents of Fukushima could decide if the decision made by prosecutors was appropriate. He added that the group would submit a request to the Fukushima prosecution inquest panel seeking to overturn the decision to transfer the complaint to Tokyo prosecutors.

One of the victims, Kazuya Tarukawa, 38, a farmer in Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture, said, "It is very heartbreaking if the decision not to indict leads to the erasing of the calls made by disaster victims to pursue responsibility for the accident."

Prior to the nuclear accident, Tarukawa's father, Hisashi, often said, "Anything made by man will one day break down. Can humans really control nuclear power plants?"

After the nuclear accident, the central government issued warnings on the consumption of certain Fukushima-grown produce. The following day, Hisashi, who was then 64, took his own life, leaving behind a cabbage crop that was ready for harvest.

Reiko Hachisuka, 61, who currently lives in temporary housing in Aizu-Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, said, "I want to shout, 'Why is no one being held responsible?' "

Hachisuka operated a flower shop in Okuma, where the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is located. She also headed the town's commerce and industry association.

After the nuclear accident, she joined the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission as a representative of disaster victims. Flabbergasted at the attitude of Tsunehisa Katsumata, TEPCO's chairman at the time of the accident, Hachisuka asked him, "What company do you serve as chairman?"

She now said she only feels frustration that no one seems to want to take responsibility for the disaster. "Even if responsible individuals were pursued, the nature of the utility would not change," she said. "I am very saddened because no one has stepped forward and said, 'I am the person responsible.' "

Cleanup delays anger Fukushima people

Ministry angers residents by pushing back Fukushima cleanup

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309110052>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Environment Ministry said it will scrap its initial road map for radioactive cleanup projects in Fukushima Prefecture but failed to set new dates for completion of the work, angering many evacuated residents.

"I have run out of patience," said farmer Muneo Kanno. "We villagers are brimming with distrust of the central government and are concerned about whether we can eventually return. We are left deprived of our lives, and our return has been kept on hold."

The 62-year-old Kanno was forced to evacuate from Iitate to Date, both in Fukushima Prefecture, after the onset of the nuclear disaster caused by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake.

The original road map said all cleanup efforts in 11 municipalities would be wrapped up before the current fiscal year ends, but the ministry said Sept. 10 that the process will continue longer in seven of them, without setting new deadlines.

The rescheduling is expected to impact when evacuated residents can return and also the rebuilding efforts from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The Environment Ministry expects to meet with the governments of the seven municipalities--Minami-Soma, Iitate, Kawamata, Katsurao, Namie, Tomioka and Futaba--to work out plans for the cleanup process, including completion dates, before year-end.

The cleanup efforts in all 11 municipalities are being overseen directly by the central government due to high radiation levels.

Released in January 2012, the initial road map said radioactive cleanup would end before the close of fiscal 2013 in all areas of the 11 municipalities designated as "zones being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order," where annual radiation doses are 20 millisieverts or less, or "no-residence zones," where annual doses are between 20-50 millisieverts.

Cleanup efforts are currently on schedule in only four municipalities: Tamura, where they have already been completed, Naraha, Okuma and Kawauchi. Efforts have not begun in Namie and Tomioka, and are yet to be even in the planning stages in Futaba.

An Environment Ministry official blamed the delay partly on difficulties in installing temporary waste storage sites, adding that obtaining the support of local communities is anything but easy.

"Given that no prospects are in sight for building an intermediate storage facility for soil and other waste from the decontamination process, people are distrustful and are concerned that such waste could be left abandoned in these temporary storage sites," the official said.

Also to blame is the slipshod nature of the initial road map, which assigned one ending date for all areas despite different circumstances, including contamination levels and the sizes of areas eligible for cleanup.

"The road map was worked out hastily amid confusion," Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara said at a news conference.

Distrust of the Environment Ministry, which had been insisting on sticking with the initial road map until now, also runs deep among municipal government officials.

"It was but an armchair theory worked out by people who knew nothing about the front-line ordeals of the cleanup process," Iitate Mayor Norio Kanno said.

In Iitate, the cleanup process has been completed for only 3 percent of all eligible houses.

Farmer Kanno, who headed a district farming association, used to raise cattle and grow highland vegetables in Iitate. The association's business, involving the home delivery of rice, vegetables and miso (fermented soybean paste), was just getting off the ground when the nuclear disaster unfolded.

"Central government officials must have known the initial plan was unfeasible," Kanno said. "Why didn't they tell us earlier?"

Evacuees problems

blog editor's note: I'm not sure what this article is trying to say

September 10, 2013

Voluntary evacuees from Fukushima returning home

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130910_48.html

An NHK survey shows that Fukushima Prefecture residents who voluntarily evacuated due mainly to the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, are gradually returning to their homes.

About 146,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture are still evacuees.

NHK surveyed all 59 municipalities in the prefecture to find the number of voluntary evacuees. These people are mainly from other places than the area surrounding the disabled Fukushima plant, where the authorities issued mandatory orders and recommendations for evacuation. They also include people whose homes were destroyed by the March 2011 quake and tsunami.

The survey found that nearly 49,000 such evacuees were living in and outside the prefecture as of August. The figure was down more than 4,000 from a year earlier.

Support group workers say that many of the voluntary evacuees are mothers and children.

The workers say some evacuees may have returned home because of the financial difficulty of maintaining 2 households when fathers stayed in their hometowns.

The workers also say others may be feeling more secure about life in their hometowns after the authorities completed decontamination procedures.

But some of the mothers who returned have moved out of the prefecture again, citing fears about radiation. They also said they felt guilty and isolated from local residents after a period of voluntary evacuation.

One support worker says there is a need to create places and opportunities so that evacuees who have returned and those who stayed at home can mingle and understand each other.

Evacuees problems (2)

September 11, 2013

2011 disaster survivors stuck in housing limbo

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201309110073

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

ISHINOMAKI, Miyagi Prefecture--Frustrations remain high for many of the tens of thousands of displaced victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, who just want a place to call home.

Two and a half years after the March 11, 2011, quake and tsunami, 103,600 survivors of the disaster still live in temporary housing units in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

Haruko Omi, 88, and her friend Toshie Inoue, 70, moved to their current provisional housing unit in Ishinomaki last year from another temporary unit in the same city.

The two, who live together, found the previous unit, with its two 4.5-mat tatami rooms, too small because the special-care bed for Inoue, who is certified by the government as physically disabled, required a large amount of space.

As a result, Omi was forced to sleep on a futon spread on the floor. The problem is Omi is also certified as an elderly person in need of long-term care and support.

"With my hips and legs getting weaker, it was difficult to even get up from the futon," Omi said.

They wanted to live in a public housing unit being built specifically for disaster survivors, but the project has moved slower than planned. They were told the apartment would not be ready until 2014 at the earliest.

Omi and Inoue reluctantly moved to the current temporary housing, which is only just slightly bigger than the previous unit. It has one six-mat room and a 4.5-mat room.

Still, the extra space means Omi now has room for a bed of her own. "Now it's easier to get up," she said.

In Ishinomaki, about 15,000 disaster survivors still live in temporary housing. Even if they find their unit has become too small due to circumstances that may include caring for the elderly or a newborn child, the most they can hope for is finding another unit not much larger than their current residence.

At present, about 80 households are still waiting for temporary housing units to become available.

Meanwhile, some residents who evacuated to other prefectures after the disaster are returning, and they too find themselves forced to live in provisional housing.

Keiko Fukuda, 34, evacuated to Yamagata, where her relatives live. She returned to Ishinomaki in March with her two children. "I thought I could no longer live in Ishinomaki" after witnessing the tsunami, she said.

But as things began to settle last year, the desire to return to Ishinomaki, her long-time place of residence, started to grow. She also worried about her mother, who had already returned to the neighboring town of Onagawa, in Miyagi Prefecture.

Fukuda moved back only after her eldest daughter, 13, graduated from elementary school.

Now she is living in a unit with two small rooms, meaning her children do not have a room to call their own.

"It's a pity for a child of that age (not to have their own room)," she said.

With prospects dim for a move into a public housing unit for disaster victims any time soon, Fukuda said, "I cannot alleviate the anxiety that plagues me about my future."

In Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, the school grounds of the municipal Daiichi Junior High School house temporary units for local disaster victims.

After his class ends, second-year student Haruto Saito, 13, with a tennis racket in hand, makes the five-minute walk downhill to temporary athletic grounds set up at the former site of a sake brewery destroyed by the tsunami.

He occasionally wishes he could return to the old school grounds where he now lives with his parents, grandparents and younger sister in provisional housing.

His mother, Hiromi, 39, said, "This is the site where the school used to hold its athletic meets. I hope we could return it to children as soon as possible."

Their temporary unit consists of a six-mat tatami room, two 4.5-mat tatami rooms and a kitchen; not enough room to secure a sleeping space or a place to study.

The family couldn't move out even if they wanted to. They are hoping to build a new house on the hill behind the junior high school, but it would take at least 18 months.

Worse, there is no guarantee the Saito family will be able to build a house there, with applicants outnumbering projections on the amount of available land for housing.

Hiromi is worried: "We only want to secure a place to live."

In Rikuzentakata, about 5,000 residents live in 53 temporary housing complexes. Of those, 10 are located on the grounds of elementary and junior high schools.

According to the city board of education, the decrease in available space where children can exercise and play sports is impacting their physical abilities. The city has a total of 12 elementary and junior high schools.

According to figures released by the National Police Agency on Sept. 10, 15,883 people in 12 prefectures lost their lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and aftershocks, with 2,654 people still missing in six prefectures. A total of 6,146 people were injured in 20 prefectures.

(This article was compiled from reports by Akiko Nagashima and Kazumasa Sugimura.)

September 10, 2013

215,000 hit by disaster still live away from home

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130911_02.html

More than 215,000 people are still living away from home in 3 Japanese prefectures 2-and-a-half years after the March 11 disaster.

On this day 30 months ago, a massive earthquake and tsunami devastated northeastern Japan.

The National Police Agency says 15,883 people are confirmed to have died in the disaster and 2,654 remain unaccounted for.

The Reconstruction Agency says 2,688 people fell ill and died after evacuation.

The evacuees from the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima are living in temporary housing or rented apartments.

The construction of public housing for displaced people is making slow progress. Only 1.6 percent of the planned units, or 448, are complete in the 3 prefectures.

People who used to live near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant still do not know when they will be able to return.

The central government's efforts to lower radioactive contamination levels in the evacuation areas are far behind schedule.

Sep. 10, 2013 - Updated 16:57 UTC

Worrying shortage of medical services in Tohoku

September 11, 2013

Tohoku still in dire need of medical support

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/11/national/tohoku-still-in-dire-need-of-medical-support/#.UjDIIm39Sb9k>

Thirty months after tsunami devastated the Tohoku coast, residents are still facing a lack of medical services because of **delays in restarting damaged hospitals and clinics and the closures of others**.

To overcome the shortage of medical staff in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, the central government has taken special measures, such as reducing the number of nurses required to operate.

The steps have not been much help in the affected areas, which was short on medical services even before the disasters. Others have given up due to concerns about overall health conditions.

In Rikuzentakata, a city in Iwate that was heavily damaged by tsunami, only 13 of 20 medical institutions have reopened. The reduction means some of the city's residents have to spend an entire day to visit a hospital.

A prefectural hospital in the city is using doctors on loan from other hospitals both in and outside the prefecture, but it is uncertain if the personnel support system can be sustained, a prefectural official said.

The situation is even worse in the Miyagi town of **Minamisanriku, where only two of 13 medical institutions have reopened**. An official at a public health center said many of them are mired in uncertainty because the town's reconstruction plans remain in flux.

Patients in serious condition and needing emergency care must be sent to the neighboring city of Ishinomaki. However, an ambulance takes more than 30 minutes to travel from Minamisanriku to Ishinomaki.

Adding insult to injury, Ishinomaki likewise faces a shortage of medical services.

"Some people have stopped going to hospitals," an Ishinomaki official said.

The city's health consultation services have been concentrated mainly on preventive steps for evacuees living in temporary housing.

In Iwate, prefectural hospitals in the towns of Yamada and Otsuchi were damaged by the March 2011 tsunami at the cost of 60 beds each.

Prefectural hospitals in neighboring areas are accepting patients from the two towns who need hospitalization. However, some patients and their families are finding it difficult to get to these distant institutions, an Iwate official said.

"We want to give them a sense of security as early as possible," the official said, emphasizing the importance of restoring local hospitals.

A hospital in Ishinomaki that was destroyed by tsunami has restarted services with a makeshift clinic, but it can't accept patients in need of emergency care or hospitalization.

As a result, patients are crowding the Japanese Red Cross Ishinomaki Hospital. The institution is swamped by a 20 percent increase in patients requiring hospitalization and a 40 percent surge in patients needing emergency care, compared with the pre-disaster levels.

To deal with the situation, the hospital is shortening patients' stays when possible.

On top of their other problems, hospitals in Fukushima Prefecture are struggling to secure staff because concerns persist about radioactive contamination.

The number of nurses has dropped at a major hospital run by the city of Mimamisoma.

"Even if we hire new nurses, they soon quit," an official at the hospital said. The hospital has 230 beds, but it only has the manpower to cover 150.

Another hospital run by the city is planning to reopen its internal medicine department next April, but an official there said they aren't sure whether it can secure enough doctors and nurses.

Tally of solitary deaths at 81 for 3/11 evacuees

kyodo

At least 81 evacuees have died alone in temporary housing in Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures since the 2011 quake and tsunami, a survey says.

But the problem of solitary deaths among survivors could be more widespread, as many moved into accommodations rented by municipal offices over a broader area, potentially severing community links, the survey suggested Wednesday.

The total, compiled by Kyodo News as of Aug. 31 based on police data, included 21 solitary deaths in Iwate, 23 in Fukushima and 37 in Miyagi. Of the deceased, 47 were over 65 and more than half died of heart and other diseases.

Settling away from disaster areas

September 13, 2013

80% of evacuees want to settle away from disaster areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130913p2a00m0na016000c.html>

More than 80 percent of evacuees from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures in the aftermath of the 2011 multiple disasters have expressed their intention to settle elsewhere and more than 30 percent of them have already done so, a fresh poll by the Mainichi Shimbun shows.

The Mainichi conducted its first semiannual poll of evacuees six months after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The latest poll is the fifth in the series and reflects a steady increase in the number of evacuees planning to resettle or have already resettled elsewhere in Japan.

According to the latest poll, more than 50 percent of evacuees made hospital visits and over 10 percent of them saw psychiatrists or psychotherapists. Over 20 percent also responded that family relationships have been aggravated.

During the latest poll in August, the Mainichi interviewed 123 evacuees, including 36 new respondents. Some 94 are from Fukushima Prefecture, 24 are from Miyagi Prefecture and five are from Iwate Prefecture.

As of Aug. 12, the Reconstruction Agency put the number of evacuees from Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate who lived in Tokyo and other Japanese prefectures at 52,277, 7,538 and 1,540, respectively.

Asked about relocating to other locations, 49 percent said they are considering doing so, 35 percent said they have already done so and 15 percent replied they are not thinking about it.

In the Mainichi's first semiannual survey of 245 respondents six months after the March 11, 2011 megaquake and tsunami which triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis, 54 percent had said they were

considering relocating. The percentage jumped to 63 percent in the second semiannual poll (129 respondents) one year after the triple disasters, 75 percent in the third poll (125 respondents) a year and a half after the disasters and 80 percent in the last poll (118 respondents) two years after the disasters, including 22 percent who said they have already resettled.

The latest poll reveals an increase of 13 percentage points in the number of evacuees who have resettled, bringing the number of evacuees who are considering resettling or who have already done so to a record 84 percent.

In a multiple-answer question about reasons for relocating to other places in the country, 60 of the total respondents in the latest poll cited fears of radiation exposure and 46 people said they have no prospects for when they can return to their hometowns.

But 52 percent of those who have resettled say they still harbor concerns. Other respondents say things like they don't know how long they can live and they cannot afford to pay rent if their housing becomes subject to fees because of their limited income.

Of the Fukushima evacuees, 55 respondents or over 60 percent said they have voluntarily evacuated and 36 people or just below 40 percent have evacuated under instructions from local governments.

As for the law for extending support to children and other Fukushima disaster victims, 49 respondents or 60 percent do not expect much of it. The latest poll also found that 57 percent have health concerns stemming from radiation exposure.

Stop the ban?

September 16, 2013

Fisheries official to ask Seoul to end food ban

Kyodo <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/16/national/fisheries-official-to-ask-seoul-to-end-food-ban/#.UjczLz95ivM>

Japan asked South Korea on Monday to rescind its expanded import ban on fisheries products from eight prefectures related to concern with radiation-contaminated water leaking into the Pacific Ocean from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Kenji Kagawa, director general of the Fisheries Agency's Resources Enhancement Promotion Department, made the request in a meeting with officials from South Korea's Food and Drug Safety Ministry.

"As we listened to Japan's opinions, we will review the situation with experts," a South Korean ministry official said.

South Korea earlier this month expanded an extant import ban to include all fisheries products from Fukushima and seven surrounding prefectures over concerns about the 300 tons of radiation-contaminated water leaking into the Pacific Ocean daily from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

South Korea's fisheries ministry also stated that a new radiation inspection certificate would be required if even a minuscule dose of radioactive material is detected in any fisheries or animal product from any other part of Japan.

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi urged South Korea to make a "calm response based on scientific grounds" to the radioactive water issue.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said shortly after South Korea's decision that the situation at the plant was under control and the contaminated water leaking from a storage tank had been confined to a small area within the artificial port of the nuclear complex. But the reality is that the water in the port is refreshed by circulation with the ocean every day.

Before announcing the augmented ban, South Korea had banned 50 fisheries products, including freshwater fish, from Fukushima, Aomori, Ibaraki, Gunma, Miyagi, Iwate, Tochigi and Chiba prefectures in light of the triple meltdowns at the aging, poorly protected plant triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Request to South Korea refused

September 17, 2013

South Korea dismisses request to lift Japanese seafood embargo

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309170026>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Seoul on Sept. 16 rejected Tokyo's request to lift a ban on Japanese seafood imports that was imposed over fears of radioactive water leaking at the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, sources said.

An official of South Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety told a visiting senior official of Japan's Fisheries Agency that the embargo will remain to ensure the health and safety of the South Korean public.

The MFDS official also called on Japan to promptly provide information on the state of radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the sources added.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has said Seoul's decision to ban the imports lacks sound scientific grounds.

South Korea's embargo took effect on Sept. 9 and covers all marine products from eight prefectures in eastern Japan, including Miyagi and Fukushima, irrespective of their actual radioactive content.

Seoul announced the ban on Sept. 6, following reports that radioactive water was leaking from the site of the Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, said in July that contaminated groundwater was flowing into the sea. The government said an estimated 300 tons of radioactive water is reaching the ocean every day.

In August, TEPCO said that 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from a storage tank on the plant premises.

What should be done?

September 16, 2013

Osaka: What on Earth should be done about the deteriorating situation at Fukushima No. 1?

by Ray Franklin

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/09/16/voices/osaka-what-on-earth-should-be-done-about-the-deteriorating-situation-at-fukushima-no-1/#.Ujs7L1NSb9k>

Masako Takaoka, 60
Cafe owner (Japanese)

We seem to have a *shō ga nai* [what can you do?] attitude about it in Japan, which I doubt Westerners would accept. Most of us go about our lives without realizing this disaster will drag on for 30-40 years until No. 1 is decommissioned. The media should report more on the real situation, and everyone, from the public to the Abe government to Tepco, needs a more urgent sense of crisis. We should attack this problem as if Godzilla was a Fukushima creation!

Lee Chang Tye, 48
Tai-chi instructor (Australian)

I worry about food safety and feel sorry for the Fukushima evacuees, farmers and fishermen who should be supported until the disaster ends, however long it takes. The Japanese should be made aware of what they can do to protect themselves against radiation, with [supplements such as] spirulina, chlorella, modiflan, etc. How can Tokyo dream of hosting the best athletes of the world at the 2020 Olympics just 200 km from a nuclear meltdown?

Danyk Amyot, 32

English teacher (Canadian)

The Tohoku quake and tsunami was a short-term natural disaster which Japan has dealt with admirably, but the Fukushima situation is a long-term man-made disaster caused entirely by Tepco. Its incompetence in dealing with *its* nuclear meltdown has become a global concern, so I think Japan must follow the advice of the international nuclear watchdogs and also allow media to cover rather than cover up what is going on. Our children deserve better!

Ayako Nakaoka, 35

Flower shop staff (Japanese)

Tepco has been incompetent in handling this disaster from the start, because it is a business thinking about its costs and investment in the No. 1 plant more than public safety. It should have been removed from the decision-making process from the start. It's two years too late, but the Japanese government needs to take over completely and call in neutral international experts. Money should not be an issue while this emergency continues.

Lorenzo Takahashi, 29

Factory worker (Filipino-Japanese)

I don't think we in Japan are being told the whole truth about Fukushima No. 1. When abroad, I noticed that NHK World in English reports more on Fukushima and gives much more information than can be seen on any channel here in Japan. Since they haven't been able to fix it themselves in more than two years, the Japanese government should ask the world for help in solving this crisis, which will probably last the rest of my life.

Tsuru Nakano, 94

Retired widow/mother (Japanese)

One thing Japan *shouldn't* do is restart any of its reactors. The past two years have proven that we can do without them. From Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Tokaimura — plutonium mixed in a bucket! — and now Fukushima, Japan has had bad luck with anything nuclear, so we should just abandon it and become a leader in clean energy instead. Japan began using nuclear power 50 years ago and we still have no idea what to do with all the spent nuclear fuel.

Interested in gathering views in your neighborhood? E-mail community@japantimes.co.jp

Postpone, but don't give up

September 18, 2013

Coastal whitebait fishing postponed in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130918_36.html

A fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture says it will put off coastal test-fishing of whitebait due to concerns about radioactive water leaks into the sea from the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

About 40 local fishermen in Iwaki City decided at a meeting on Wednesday to **postpone at least until next spring the fishing originally planned for late September.**

They said gaining understanding from consumers would be difficult due to a delay in implementing measures to deal with leaked radioactive water.

A report presented at the meeting explained radiation tests carried out this month on marine products caught in the area.

The tests detected no radiation in most of the samples and extremely low levels of radioactive substances in some of them.

Despite the postponement on whitebait fishing the fishermen decided to start offshore test-fishing on September 26th, saying there's no safety problem.

The head of the cooperative expressed fierce anger that radioactive water has leaked. He said he hopes consumers will understand that they will never give up fishing despite the current problems.

Another fisheries cooperative in Soma City, also in Fukushima, plans to resume offshore test-fishing on September 26th as well.

Fukushima workers/residents angry at Abe

September 20, 2013

People working at, living near Fukushima plant say Abe is in the dark

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309200083>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

To workers facing the perils at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and residents in the surrounding communities, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's plant tour and his attempts to show the government taking control of the radiation-contaminated water problem left them angry.

"No one believes that the contaminated water is being controlled," said Katsunobu Sakurai, the mayor of Minami-Soma, whose residents were asked to evacuate following the nuclear accident in March 2011. "What can he know after riding to the plant on a bus and looking around for just a moment?"

After Abe said that water was being completely blocked from the ocean, following his visit to the Fukushima plant on Sept. 19, one man who has helped assemble the tanks from which contaminated water has leaked said, "I wonder if he is using words like 'blocked' and 'control' after really understanding what is going on at the site."

He said that not even Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, may be fully aware of the extent of the problems surrounding contaminated water.

The man recalls that one day he saw contaminated water spraying out of a tank. An employee of an affiliated company to TEPCO wore a raincoat over protective clothing to tighten a bolt on the tank, even as he was being showered with leaking water.

The man witnessed a similar scene on another day. However, TEPCO made no announcement about the two incidents.

"The affiliated company probably did not want to get on the bad side of TEPCO, so it stopped the leak and concealed the defect in the tank," the man said. "I believe more contaminated water is leaking than the announcements made so far by TEPCO."

The man was in charge of placing rubber packing between the connecting parts of the steel materials used in the tanks and using an electric screwdriver to tighten bolts. It took several days for a team of workers to assemble a single tank.

"As far as I knew, none of the workers had any experience making tanks," the man said. "There were many workers from outside Fukushima Prefecture, like Okinawa and Hokkaido, and the turnover in workers was rapid."

Radiation levels were high even in the rest areas where workers ate their meals. Alarms would inevitably go off during inspections for radioactive materials at the end of a work day.

Because protective clothing had to be worn even during the height of the record summer heat, the man said he came close to suffering from heatstroke, as his arms and legs began trembling.

"It is not work humans should have to do," the man said. "The workers will be unable to continue. The prime minister should spend one day working at the plant site to understand what the situation is really like."

Local officials were also critical of Abe's grasp of the situation.

The Soma-Futaba fishing cooperative association plans to resume trial operations from Sept. 26, after postponing a resumption date earlier in the month after hundreds of tons of radioactive water were discovered to be flowing into the sea from the Fukushima plant.

"(The prime minister) has no idea what is happening," said Hiroyuki Sato, who heads the association. "Consumers will never trust us unless he correctly says, 'Although contaminated water continues to flow into the ocean, fortunately, the fish that are being brought into port as well as the waters off the coast are not contaminated.' "

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa also could not hide his anger at Abe, whose plant visit lasted about three hours.

"He should look at the many people who continue to live as evacuees so he can be aware that the situation is far from being under control," Izawa said.

Keisuke Ishii, 70, evacuated from Namie, which has been designated as an area where residents face difficulties in returning. Now living elsewhere in temporary housing in Fukushima Prefecture, he said, "The visit was nothing but a performance. He (Abe) should see for himself that nothing is being controlled."

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi and Shinichi Fujiwara.)

"It's only natural that the reactors are scrapped"

September 20, 2013

Fukushima residents view plan to scrap 2 reactors as a matter of course

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130920p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's renewed assertion that the situation at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is under control, many residents of Fukushima Prefecture expressed skepticism about his argument, saying they are not quite sure about its validity.

After an inspection tour of the crippled Fukushima plant on Sept. 19, Abe reiterated that effects from contaminated water are fully contained within the bay and the situation at the plant is under control. The Japanese leader originally made the statement before the International Olympic Committee on Sept. 7 to make a pitch for Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics.

Abe also said at the Fukushima plant that he will ask Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to scrap the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors. Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato who has called for decommissioning all reactors at the nuclear plant said Abe's request to TEPCO follows his prefecture's wishes. Fukushima residents took Abe's request as a matter of course.

Yoshii Yoshida, 75, lives in temporary housing in Aizuwakamatsu after evacuating from his house in Okuma, less than 5 kilometers from the nuclear power plant. **He blasted Abe's visit to the plant as a mere formality and urged the prime minister to listen to him and other evacuees who have been left not knowing whether they could ever return to their hometowns** since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Kimiko Kuroki, 55, and her 82-year-old mother are from Futaba, another town near the nuclear plant, and now live in a temporary house in the city of Iwaki. Before getting excited about the Tokyo Olympics and the maglev Linear Chuo Shinkansen, Kuroki said the government should give top priority to improving temporary housing and building public houses for victims of the multiple disasters.

Shoichi Yabuki, 76, heads the Iwaki fisheries cooperative which will resume trial fishing on Sept. 26. "We have asked the central government to take measures against harmful rumors but the government has done nothing," he said, adding his cooperative has no choice but to resume fishing at its own initiative. He also said Abe should directly explain to him and other local fishermen if the premier continues to maintain that the situation is under control. Akira Egawa, the cooperative's 66-year-old deputy chief, said Abe should consume Fukushima fish to dispel harmful rumors.

A 28-year-old housewife in the city of Fukushima took her 2-year-old and 8-month-old daughters to the indoor amusement facility Sand Park, designed for young children to play without fear of exposure to radiation. She said she wants TEPCO to scrap the No. 5 and 6 reactors as soon as possible because another temblor may strike again.

A 38-year-old housewife has evacuated from Futaba and now lives with her 12-year-old daughter in the Saitama prefectural city of Kazo. "It's only natural that the (No. 5 and 6) reactors are scrapped. The nuclear facilities probably have been heavily damaged due to the earthquake, and I'm sure all evacuees from the nuclear accident think the reactors have to be decommissioned."

Shiro Izawa, mayor of Futaba where the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors are located, said scrapping the two reactors is a matter of course. But he criticized Prime Minister Abe for announcing his request to TEPCO without consulting him in advance. Izawa said he will confirm the Abe government's real intentions. The mayor also said the central government is totally neglecting evacuees and local governments, in the same

way it ignored local communities in its response immediately after the nuclear meltdowns and subsequent efforts to bring the situation under control.

At 2:25 a.m. on Sept. 20, a magnitude 5.9 earthquake rattled Fukushima Prefecture, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. Its focus was about 17 kilometers underground in the Hamadori region and registered upper 5 on the Japanese intensity scale of 7 in Iwaki. No tsunami warning was issued.

Statute of limitations (for compensation) should be extended

September 21, 2013

LDP seeks to extend statute of limitations for nuclear accident damage claims to 10 years

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309210059>

By SHINICHI SEKINE/ Staff Writer

A bill proposed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party will extend the statute of limitations by seven years for filing claims for damages from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, **as thousands of victims have not come forward for redress.**

The move is intended to prevent Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, from refusing to compensate victims on the basis of the three-year statute of limitations for damage claims.

The LDP is set to submit the bill in the extraordinary Diet session that starts next month.

While the planned legislation will likely help more victims to receive compensation, it may prompt the central government to overhaul the existing framework for assisting TEPCO. Experts say it is difficult to predict the final cost of the legislation.

Of the 160,000 people who were ordered by authorities to evacuate after the accident occurred at the plant on March 11, 2011, about 10,000 victims have yet to file claims for damages with the utility.

They could lose their right to make a claim after 2014 due to the three-year statute of limitations under the Civil Law.

The proposed legislation aims to extend the statute of limitations for claims to 10 years.

The Japan Federation of Bar Associations, which has called for the same 10-year limit as a creditor's claim, put the number of eligible victims who have not yet made damage claims with TEPCO at nearly 1 million. The figure includes those whose business operations suffered as well as those who evacuated at their own discretion.

"A large number of evacuees are still being forced to live under restricted conditions, making it harder for many to exercise their right to compensation," said the draft outline of the legislation, which was compiled by an LDP committee on supporting victims of the nuclear accident and rebuilding of local industries.

Fukushiro Nukaga, a former finance minister who leads the committee, said lawmakers will work to sponsor the legislation and pass it in the extraordinary Diet session. The Diet members held hearings over the matter with local officials in Fukushima Prefecture on Sept. 19-20.

The proposed bill appears to be drawing support.

Hakubun Shimomura, education minister, already suggested to the LDP a bill aimed to give relief to the victims. New Komeito, a junior coalition partner of the LDP, plans to hold a meeting shortly to study the proposed measure.

TEPCO said that it would not outright turn down a claim based on the statute of limitations. But it has not explicitly committed to not using it as a reason for rejecting claims in the future.

A special law was enacted in May to help victims if they seek a settlement brokered by the nuclear damage compensation dispute resolution center, an alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

The center, set up under the education ministry, is run by experts at the education ministry, justice ministry, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and courts.

But the federation said few victims have turned to the mechanism due to cumbersome procedures involved in the process.

The central government established a system to temporarily shoulder costs for compensation and cleanup for TEPCO up to 5 trillion yen (\$50 billion).

The payout of compensation has so far totaled 3.8 trillion yen.

Efforts to clean up areas surrounding the plant are expected to cost in excess of 5 trillion yen.

The extension of the statute of limitations could result in the ballooning of compensation payouts, prompting the central government to review the existing framework concerning TEPCO.

Royal visit

September 22, 2013

Crown prince, princess visit displaced people in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130922p2g00m0dm055000c.html>

KORIYAMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako took a day trip to Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, on Sunday to visit people affected by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami.

The couple last visited the prefecture in July 2011. In late August this year, they visited displaced people in neighboring Miyagi Prefecture.

In Koriyama, the royal couple were greeted by around 50 of the 80 residents in temporary housing, who evacuated from the town of Futaba in the same prefecture due to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster.

Crown Prince Naruhito expressed sympathy to Kisa Horikawa, 76, who lost her husband about three months ago.

Crown Princess Masako told another evacuee, "Please, be careful about your health."

The couple also visited a facility that measures the radiation levels of produce as well as Pep Kids Koriyama indoor playground, where around 240 children and parents were present.

Fukushima Prefecture runs the radiation measuring facility in an effort to reduce the reputational damage to farmers in Fukushima Prefecture from the nuclear crisis.

On Friday, the crown prince and princess met with Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, and were briefed about the situation at the Fukushima plant, including recent leaks of radiation-contaminated water.

Disaster-hit municipalities trying to outdo each other

September 23, 2013

Fearing exodus, disaster-hit towns compete to offer highest subsidies

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201309230001>

Municipalities in the Tohoku disaster area are so intent on outdoing each other in terms of reconstruction subsidies that the prefectural and central governments have warned against the heated competition.

The local governments, however, say they are running out of options to save their towns from a population exodus.

"It's a life-or-death problem for the town," said Yutaka Ikarigawa, mayor of Otsuchi, a coastal town in Iwate Prefecture that has seen its population drop by 20 percent since the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. "We want to prevent any more people from leaving however we can."

Disaster survivors in high-risk areas of Iwate Prefecture inundated by the 2011 tsunami can receive 3 million yen in assistance, mainly from the national and prefectural governments, to build new homes at different locations within the prefecture. They can also receive a subsidy of up to 7.08 million yen to pay interest on a mortgage.

Municipalities are offering additional subsidies for home reconstruction. And that's where the competition is taking place.

In October last year, Otsuchi announced a 1.5-million-yen subsidy, 500,000 yen more than what the nearby cities of Kamaishi and Ofunato were offering.

A senior Otsuchi official said the town had first waited to see how much others could offer "to make better bids."

But in May this year, Ofunato announced it would raise its subsidy from 1 million yen to 2 million. Kamaishi followed suit in June.

Otsuchi decided in July to increase its subsidy to 2 million yen.

The Iwate prefectural government gathered officials from the municipalities and told them to “try and share information” instead of competing against each other.

An official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications said: “If this battle to outdo each other keeps up, those municipalities won't have the budgets to fund (the subsidies.)”

Complaints are also being raised over the differences in assistance levels in the Tohoku region. Many survivors are stuck in temporary housing because they lack the funds to rebuild.

Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, which hosts a nuclear power plant operated by Tohoku Electric Power Co., subsidizes payments for mortgage interest and provides assistance of up to 3 million yen to keep residents in the town.

The town's population has fallen from more than 10,000 to around 7,700.

“The reason why we offer better subsidies than other municipalities is that we are more attentive to the issue,” a town official said.

The city of Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture, has a cap of 1.5 million yen on cash subsidies for home reconstruction, below the limit in the city of Rikuzentakata in neighboring Iwate Prefecture, where it is 2 million yen.

Rikuzentakata also disburses a separate subsidy of up to 2.5 million yen on mortgage interest.

“We're all disaster survivors. Why the inequality?” asked a 64-year-old man who wants to rebuild his home in Kesenuma.

“We also have to set aside money in the budget for industrial assistance and maintaining temporary housing,” a Kesenuma official said. “We can't just use it all on rebuilding homes.”

Hiroya Masuda, an adviser to Nomura Research Institute and a former minister of internal affairs and communications, agrees that measures to revitalize the local community should be considered in plans to support housing reconstruction.

“Even if you rebuild homes, the disaster survivors won’t come back if there’s no place to work,” he said. “Municipalities should figure out what survivors want in order to return to their former lives, and they should only compete on coming up with ideas to rebuild communities.”

(This article was written by Hiroki Mukai and Masakazu Higashino)

Try again

September 23, 2013

DPJ asks S.Korea to lift ban on Japanese seafood

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130923_26.html

Senior members from Japan's largest opposition party have asked South Korea's ruling party to lift a ban on imports of Japanese marine products.

The ban was imposed on products from 8 Japanese prefectures, in connection with leaks of contaminated water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Democratic Party Secretary General Akihiro Ohata and others met South Korea's Saenuri Party Chairman, Hwang Woo-yea, in Seoul on Monday.

Ohata said marine products are being consumed without anxiety in Japan. He urged South Korea to deal with Japanese food imports on a scientific basis.

Hwang responded the consumption of South Korean seafood is also declining due to rumors about radioactive fallout in the ocean.

Hwang said it's important for both countries to provide objective data. He also proposed an on-site inspection at the plant by Japanese and South Korean lawmakers.

The DPJ members then met South Korea's National Assembly Chairman Kang Chang-hee. They agreed that exchanges between both countries' parties and lawmakers are important to improve bilateral ties.

Relations between Japan and South Korea have been strained due to disputes over territorial issues and their interpretation of history.

Fishermen to resume fishing

September 24, 2013

Fukushima fishermen to resume offshore fishing

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130924_39.html

A fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture says it will resume offshore test-fishing after several weeks of suspension.

The Soma-Futaba Fisheries Cooperative suspended operations in early September over concerns about radioactive water leaks from the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The fishermen decided at a meeting on Tuesday that they will resume test-fishing north of the prefecture on Wednesday, as radiation tests on marine products in that area indicated no problems.

The head of the cooperative said he hopes the plant operator will cause no more trouble and prevent further leaks of radioactive water.

Another fisheries cooperative in Iwaki City, also in Fukushima Prefecture, plans to start offshore test-fishing next week.

Sep. 24, 2013 - Updated 11:09 UTC

Fukushima fisheries to resume trial fishing after samples prove safe

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/24/national/fukushima-fisheries-to-resume-trial-fishing-after-samples-prove-safe/#.UkHdHFM0_9k

FUKUSHIMA – Fishing operations off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture were set to resume Wednesday, about a month after leaks of contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant forced trial operations to be put on hold.

The Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations said Tuesday that “**through tests we know the radioactive levels of the fish are not an issue and that they are safe.**”

Out of 100 fish and seafood products tested, 95 were clear of radioactive substances and the remaining five contained less than one-tenth of the government's limit of 100 becquerels for food products, the fishing co-op said.

Operations were to resume at around 2 a.m., starting with the Soma Futaba fisheries cooperative covering the northern part of the prefecture. According to the cooperative, the catch will be put on sale as early as Thursday, with part of it to be distributed outside of Fukushima.

With Tokyo Electric Power Co. still unable to contain the contaminated water leaking into the ocean, however, it remains to be seen how receptive consumers will be to seafood from Fukushima.

Tetsu Nozaki, chairman of the prefectural federation, told reporters that selling the products will be a step toward gaining acceptance from consumers.

Trial fisheries operations began roughly 15 months after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami caused the breakdown at Fukushima No. 1.

The trial operations limit the area that can be fished and only allow products confirmed safe to be shipped.

Groundwater cannot be controlled : two different titles for the same article

September 24, 2013

Ex-U.S. nuke regulator: Japan slow on Fukushima leak

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309240093>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A former U.S. nuclear regulatory chief said on Sept. 24 that leaks of contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima plant had been known since early in the crisis and have worsened because Japan acted too slowly.

Gregory Jaczko said that U.S. and Japanese officials knew leaks would occur when massive amounts of water were used to cool molten reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after a major earthquake and tsunami hit in March 2011.

Jaczko said he was surprised how long it took Japan to start tackling the problem.

"It's been known for a long time that this would be an issue," he told a news conference in Tokyo. "My biggest surprise is to some extent how it's been allowed to deteriorate, a little bit, and how it's almost become a surprise again that there are contamination problems, that there is leakage out into the sea."

When the plant was in critical condition with three reactor cores melted and in dire need of cooling water, Jaczko said, Japanese and U.S. officials disputed how much water should be put in because of the imminent leaks of radiation contaminated water and measures needed to contain that problem.

He said the Japanese government was concerned that the flooding those reactor vessels and reactor buildings with cooling water "would lead to greater leakage of ground water," whereas the NRC emphasized the need to keep reactors cool and under control to minimize airborne contamination.

But the "focus was lost" on the need to keep addressing the radioactive water problem, apparently delaying action on mitigating the problem, said Jaczko, who was in Japan at the invitation of an anti-nuclear citizen's group. He resigned as chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission last year.

Japanese officials confirmed for first time in July that contaminated ground water has been leaking into the Pacific from soon after the accident.

Leaders of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, which was in power during the crisis, acknowledged last week that a plan to build an underground wall to surround the reactor and turbine buildings to block contaminated water leaks from the area was put off after plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. resisted the plan, citing financial reasons.

Only the construction of the steel seawall to prevent the leaks into the sea has since begun, set for completion next year.

Democratic lawmaker Sumio Mabuchi, who was special assistant to the prime minister during the crisis, told a party meeting on Sept. 18 that in June 2011 TEPCO promised to build an underground wall but asked that a public announcement not be made to avoid "public confusion" over the huge additional cost burden on the struggling utility.

A TEPCO internal memo, dated June 13, 2011, and obtained on Sept. 24 by the Associated Press, acknowledges the need to build an underground boundary, possibly made of clay-soil slurry mix, around the No. 1-4 reactor and turbine basements to stop contaminants from leaking into groundwater and eventually flowing into the sea.

The plan was submitted to the government after the first massive leak of highly toxic water from the No. 2 reactor basement in April 2011 "in order not to further contaminate the sea," the memo said, promising to start construction of the wall as soon as it obtained government permission.

The memo noted that the cost of the wall could go as high as 100 billion yen (\$1 billion), saying the company was concerned about unclear government funding prospects. TEPCO was nationalized in July 2012.

In a statement earlier this month, TEPCO cited technical complexity in designing the wall, as well as high radiation levels near the reactor area as reasons for not building the wall.

Public criticism of TEPCO and the government for their handling of the crisis remains high, especially after the recent string of underground water leaks into the ocean and from storage tanks holding contaminated water used to cool the reactors.

The government is funding the development of more advanced water treatment equipment to make the contaminated water clean enough to be released into the sea and paying for a costly ice wall to surround the reactor and turbine buildings to prevent further contamination of outside groundwater.

Ex-NRC chairman says radioactive water problem will not affect Tokyo

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130924p2g00m0dm074000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory Jaczko said Tuesday a massive buildup of radiation-contaminated water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant poses no threat to Tokyo, which will host the 2020 Summer Olympics.

"There is no immediate impact from the contamination issues at the Fukushima Daiichi plant on Tokyo," Jaczko told the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo, when asked about Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's recent remark that the situation "is under control."

But he noted that groundwater, which gets contaminated as it seeps into the crippled Fukushima plant's reactor buildings or passes through the site, "cannot be controlled."

Around 400 tons of groundwater enters the basements of the reactor buildings every day and becomes contaminated as it mixes with the highly toxic water that is used to cool the three reactors that suffered meltdowns. The water is then pumped out from the buildings and stored in tanks.

To address the problem, the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. plan to embark on an unprecedented attempt to create a huge frozen underground wall around the Nos. 1 to 4 reactor buildings to block groundwater from seeping into the basement.

"You can try and do things to mitigate the impact of that groundwater on the site. But whether it's an ice wall... whatever system you build, groundwater will find a way around it and into it and affect it," Jaczko said.

Jaczko, who was the NRC chairman when the Fukushima accident occurred on March 11, 2011, said the problem involving contaminated water had been expected "from the beginning." However, he said he was surprised how it has been allowed to deteriorate and was concerned there seemed to be no focus on the need to continue to address the issue.

The Fukushima plant, about 250 kilometers northeast of Tokyo, has drawn renewed attention following radioactive water leaks and other incidents earlier this year.

To allay the concerns of the international community, Abe said during a presentation to the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires in early September that "the situation is under control" and offered assurances that there "will never be health problems."

Prayers for victims

September 24, 2013

Nuclear evacuees pray for tsunami victims near Fukushima plant



Nuclear disaster evacuees pray for the victims of the March 2011 tsunami in front of a memorial set up along a road in the Ukedo district of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on Sept. 23. The vicinity is still dotted with tsunami-destroyed houses and a stranded fishing boat. The stacks of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are seen in the distance, in the center background. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130924p2a00m0na016000c.html>

NAMIE, Fukushima -- Nuclear disaster evacuees temporarily visited this town near the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to pray for the victims of the 2011 tsunami on Sept. 23, during the autumnal equinoctial week when Buddhist services are performed in Japan.

Masanari Kawaguchi, 50, and his wife Keiko, 45, visited the Ukedo district of the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on Sept. 23 to pray for two relatives who perished in the district in the tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan

Earthquake on March 11, 2011. The Kawaguchis have been evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma to the prefectural city of Aizuwakamatsu due to the nuclear disaster.

The couple put their hands together in front of a memorial set up along a road, which stands near a tsunami-stranded ship and debris and commands a view of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in the distance.

"Whenever we come here, we only see grown weeds, while nothing else has changed," said the couple.

The entire district of Ukedo still remains designated as an evacuation zone, more than two and a half years after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis.

Sept. 23 is the middle day of the autumnal equinoctial week, which falls on the autumn equinox.

Fukushima fishermen test-fishing again

September 25, 2013

Fukushima fishermen land catch from test-fishing

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130925_40.html

Fishermen from Fukushima Prefecture have unloaded their fish catches after test-fishing resumed following a suspension due to concerns over radioactive water leaks.

Twenty-one trawlers returned on Wednesday afternoon to a port in Soma City in the north of the prefecture. They had been fishing since the morning.

Offshore trial fishing was suspended in early September after tainted water leaked into the sea from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Officials with the Fukushima fisheries federation say they decided to resume operations after tests of fish and seawater showed they were safe.

Fishermen are allowed to operate under certain conditions.

The catches are limited to 16 types of fish that were found to have either no radiation or radiation levels well within safety limits. The fishing grounds must be at least 50 kilometers from the plant and at least 150 meters deep.

A local fisheries cooperative says the trawlers unloaded about 5,200 kilograms of fish. They caught 11 species, including giant octopuses, spear squids and hairy crabs.

Samples are being tested for radioactivity.

The cooperative plans to put the catches on sale at local markets on Thursday after their safety is

confirmed. It also plans to ship the fish to Tokyo and elsewhere.

The prefectural fisheries federation says it plans to start trial fishing off Iwaki, in southern Fukushima Prefecture, next month.

Sep. 25, 2013 - Updated 10:59 UTC

Trial fishing operations resume off Fukushima Prefecture



Trawlers from the Futaba Soma fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture set out from Matsukawaura fishing port in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, to conduct trial operations, at 2 a.m. on Sept. 25. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130925p2a00m0na002000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations resumed trial fishing off the coast of Fukushima on Sept. 25, roughly one month after operations were suspended amid concerns about contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

At about 2 a.m. on Sept. 25, 21 trawlers registered with the Soma Futaba fisheries cooperative departed one after another from Matsukawaura fishing port in Soma, and started fishing some 50 kilometers off northern Fukushima Prefecture, between the districts of Shinchi and Futaba, at depths of 150 meters or more.

In a message before the vessels departed, federation head Hiroyuki Sato said, "You probably harbor all sorts of feelings on the contaminated water problem, but put your motivation into action so we can make this lead to full-scale operations."

The trawlers were to return to port in the afternoon of Sept. 25 and land their catches, upon which tests for radioactive materials were to be conducted. Marine products in which no radioactive contamination is detected (including products whose radiation levels are below the lowest detectable level), will be shipped out as early as Sept. 26, to be sold in supermarkets and other outlets on a trial basis.

The Soma Futaba fisheries cooperative started trial operations in June last year, catching three types of fish, and had gradually been expanding its fishing zone and the varieties of fish caught.

Another fisheries cooperative in the Iwaki district, in the south of Fukushima Prefecture, plans to begin trial operations on Oct. 3 for the first time since the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Fukushima fishermen resume test-fishing

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130925_09.html

A fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture has resumed offshore test-fishing after several weeks. Fishing was suspended after radioactive water was found to be leaking into the ocean from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

21 trawlers left Matsukawaura Port in Soma City on Wednesday morning.

Before their departure, the head of the Soma-Futaba Fisheries Cooperative, Hiroyuki Sato, called on the fishermen to resume full-scale fishing by overcoming difficulties.

The cooperative decided on Tuesday to resume test-fishing. Officials say radiation tests of marine products and seawater indicated no problems and their safety has been confirmed.

Test-fishing is limited to 16 kinds of fish, including octopus and squid. No radioactive materials have been detected in these species. They also have significantly lower levels of radiation than the government standards.

The test-fishing is limited to areas more than 50 kilometers from Fukushima Daiichi and more than 150 meters deep.

Fishermen are to continue fishing until noon and will land their catch at the port in the evening.

The cooperative will check the radiation levels of the fish before shipping them to the market.
Sep. 24, 2013 - Updated 22:21 UTC

First rice harvest

September 25, 2013

First rice harvest more than 2 years after tsunami

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130925_30.html

Farmers in Miyagi Prefecture are bringing in their first rice crop since the giant tsunami more than 2 years ago devastated their paddies.

Harvesting of the popular Hitomebore rice began on Wednesday in the Tamaura Nanbu district of Iwanuma City.

Salt water from the March 2011 tsunami destroyed 150 hectares of rice paddies in the district, and swept away farmers' homes and equipment.

In February, 15 farmers set up a cooperative to revive rice-growing. They planted about 10 hectares of paddies where the salt had been removed.

The head of the cooperative said he worried about whether he could continue to grow rice in the district, and that he is overjoyed with the first harvest in 3 years.

Farmers in the cooperative say they will plant about 70 hectares of rice next year, in paddies entrusted to them by other farmers in the district.

Fukushima town may resume shipping rice

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130925_28.html

A town near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is preparing to ship rice for the first time since the March 2011 disaster.

Hirono town is located within a 30 kilometer radius of the nuclear plant. Local farmers voluntarily suspended rice growing following the disaster because of radioactive contamination.

Rice production resumed in the town earlier this year for the first time in 3 years. Last year's harvest tested within the allowable radioactive levels decided by the national government.

On Wednesday, radioactive tests on rice fresh from paddies began at an agricultural cooperative facility in a neighboring town.

All the rice harvested from 110 hectares, or nearly half the total of paddies in Hirono Town, will be tested.

Only rice that passes a stricter-than-the state safety standard will be shipped to market. But concern remains over whether consumers will buy rice from the town.

A town official said they will work to assure consumers that only safe rice will be shipped. He stressed that winning consumer confidence will be the key to restoring business.

Sep. 25, 2013 - Updated 04:42 UTC

Local gov'ts criticize Reconstruction Agency's "double standards"

September 24, 2013

Municipalities criticize gov't agency for limiting Fukushima disaster aid

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130924p2a00m0na020000c.html>

At least 13 municipalities in Chiba, Ibaraki and Tochigi prefectures have sent critical comments to the Reconstruction Agency for **its basic policy to limit the scope of assistance to only areas in Fukushima Prefecture affected by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.**

The 13 municipalities, which are not covered by the draft basic implementation policy under the "Act on the Protection and Support for the Children and other Victims" of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, submitted critical "public comments" on the disaster aid program to the Reconstruction Agency. The deadline for such public comments was set for Sept. 23.

It is rare for municipal governments to submit such critical public comments to government authorities. Such action is largely based on a sense of injustice over the policy of limiting the scope of aid only to those people in Fukushima Prefecture. Some of the municipalities are rejecting the draft policy outright, with the Shiroy Municipal Government in Chiba Prefecture saying, for example, "The off-the-shelf way of drawing a line by regions runs counter to the principles of law."

The law, enacted in June 2012, stipulates that areas with at least a certain level of annual cumulative radiation dosage shall be eligible for the government assistance and a basic policy containing necessary assistance measures shall be worked out. However, the draft policy worked out by the Reconstruction

Agency only designated 33 municipalities in the eastern half of Fukushima Prefecture as areas eligible for the assistance, without setting specific criteria for radiation doses. The Reconstruction Agency has not clarified the scope of specific assistance for so-called "quasi-regions eligible for assistance," which include areas in the western half of Fukushima Prefecture and in neighboring prefectures.

The Reconstruction Agency publicly sought opinions on the aid scheme after announcing the draft basic policy on Aug. 30. After checking the websites of municipal governments and other sources, the Mainichi Shimbun found that 13 municipalities submitted their public comments on the draft policy to the agency. Those municipalities are: Noda, Kashiwa, Kamagaya, Matsudo, Shiroyama, Nagareyama, Sakura, Abiko and Inzai in Chiba Prefecture; Toride, Moriya, and Josono in Ibaraki Prefecture; and Nasushiobara in Tochigi Prefecture.

The central government sets the maximum permissible amount of radiation exposure per year for the general public at 1 millisievert (0.23 microsieverts per hour). The government designated those areas (municipalities) that were exposed to radiation exceeding the permissible limit as "Intensive Contamination Survey Areas," and has since been providing assistance to them. Currently, 100 municipalities in eight prefectures are designated as "Intensive Contamination Survey Areas," and the 13 municipalities are among them.

In their opinions submitted to the Reconstruction Agency, all of the 13 municipal governments called for attaching importance to health assistance for children and pregnant women. **They are critical of the government for applying "double standards" with the decontamination law and the nuclear disaster aid law.** Municipalities such as Abiko insist that those areas designated as "Intensive Contamination Survey Areas" be eligible for the nuclear disaster assistance. Public comments are solicited from the general public when laws, regulations or institutions are to be established or revised, but it is rare for local municipalities to submit critical comments en masse.

Ready for sale

September 26, 2013

Fish caught off Fukushima Prefecture to hit the market

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130926p2a00m0na009000c.html>

SOMA, Fukushima -- Fishery products caught off Fukushima Prefecture were ready for trial sale as early as Sept. 26 after fisheries cooperatives here resumed test fishing the day before.

Some 5.2 tons of 11 varieties of fish -- including octopus, horsehair crab, blackbelly rosefish and angler -- were landed at the Matsukawaura Port in Soma, northern Fukushima Prefecture, after 21 dragnet fishing boats returned there on the afternoon of Sept. 25.

After screening the catches for radioactive materials, the seafood is to go on trial sale at supermarkets and other retailers as early as Sept. 26.

The 58-year-old captain of a 19-ton boat that took part in the trial said, "I felt good when I went fishing, but I'm concerned whether the catches will find buyers. I want consumers to feel secure and eat the products as we will only ship them after screening them strictly."

A 61-year-old official with the Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative said, "We can only earn a living on the sea. We had come to a standstill, but we will move forward toward full-scale fishing."

The trial operation by the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations had been suspended for nearly one month since the revelation of radioactively contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

A local fisheries cooperative in Iwaki, southern Fukushima Prefecture, will also embark on test fishing on Oct. 3, for the first time since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

(Related link)

Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations: <http://www.jf-net.ne.jp/fsgyoren/>

Trial fishing restarted

September 26, 2013

Trial fishing operations restart off Fukushima coast

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201309260069

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Fishermen in this northeastern city resumed trial operations on Sept. 25 for the first time in three months, **despite little hope of ever capturing the bounty their livelihood once provided.**

The Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association had postponed its initial plan to restart trial operations in early September, after hundreds of tons of radioactive water were found to be leaking into the sea from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Twenty-one trawlers left Matsukawaura Port early in the day and brought home 5 tons of seafood, including octopus and squid.

Those confirmed safe for consumption in the sampling inspection will be shipped to markets, including the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo's Chuo Ward.

Toshihiro Miharu, captain of the Gaho Maru, was one of the fishermen who eagerly awaited the day.

Up until just a few days ago, Miharu had been spending his time collecting debris from the 2011 tsunami off the coast in his 19-ton trawler.

“One can only be called a fisherman if he fishes,” Miharu, 54, said. “You cannot be a fisherman if all you do is collect debris.”

Shortly before 5 a.m. the boat arrived at the trial operation area 50 kilometers off Matsukawaura Port, and the crew members cast the trawling nets.

A buzzer sounded two hours later, and the crew started to haul in the nets.

Even though only 16 marine products, including octopus, squid and horsehair crab, are targeted for test operations, the catch included flounder and many other species, which are restricted by the central government due to a high concentration of radioactivity.

According to Miharu, slime flounder had sold well before the Great East Japan Earthquake struck.

Miharu’s 50-year-old brother Yukihide, the chief engineer, and eldest son Yuta, 27, and other fishermen sorted and separated eligible species from the rest of the catch. A tatami mat and window frames were also found in the nets.

The day’s haul of the Gaho Maru totaled 2.5 tons. Of that, the target fish species weighed only 250 kilograms.

The rest, or 90 percent of the catch, had to be thrown back into the sea.

“Do you understand what it is like for a fisherman to throw away fish he caught into the sea?” Miharu asked. He then added, “I want the prime minister to come here and live with us since he said such a thing (his assurance that the Fukushima nuclear crisis is under control) at his speech in the bid for Tokyo to host the 2020 Olympic Games.”

“I am a third generation fisherman,” Miharu said. “My father kept drinking at home to forget his hardship. So I used to think of working on the land, maybe as a sushi chef.”

But Miharu succeeded his father after graduating from local high school.

His son Yuta made clear he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps when he was in his third year at senior high school.

For his successor, Miharu spent 150 million yen (\$1.52 million) to build a new boat.

The disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, situated on the coast, occurred only a few years later.

Miharu is sympathetic to the anxieties of consumers with regard to food safety.

“There is no prospect for resuming full-scale fishing operations,” Miharu said. “Old residents here buy fish from the sea off Fukushima Prefecture. But once a trace of concentration of radioactive material is detected (from fish), I—a fisherman—would not have my grandchildren eat it, either.”

Fukushima Prefecture has been testing radioactive cesium levels in marine products caught in local waters since April 2011, one month after the reactor meltdowns.

It measures weekly radiation levels of 150 or so fish samples at about 40 locations in waters off Fukushima Prefecture, except the area within a 5-km radius of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant.

In tests in recent months, most marine samples, including olive flounder, marbled flounder and white bait, showed levels below the detection limit of 16 becquerels per kilogram. Most of the 16 target products for trial operations also showed low readings below the limit.

Overgrown areas attract too many boars

September 24, 2013

More boars mean more damage in Fukushima**

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/24/national/more-boars-mean-more-damage-in-fukushima/#.UkKB91M0_9k

FUKUSHIMA – Wild boars are taking a toll on agriculture in Fukushima Prefecture as farmers struggle to bounce back from the planting bans imposed after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011.

The boars are multiplying and entering areas they previously avoided as underbrush once routinely cleared in the nearby mountains grows back, affording them places to hide.

In late August, 61-year-old Noriyoshi Kato from the Onami district in the city of Fukushima looked at his rice paddy in despair.

“They came and did this at night,” the rice farmer said as he surveyed the damage done by the wild boars. Kato began planting rice after the government lifted the ban imposed on the district after the disaster in 2011.

With harvest time just a month away, the boars apparently had crawled under an electric fence Kato had set up around his field to protect the budding ears of rice.

“The boars wouldn’t come near the rice paddies before the accident,” Kato said.

In those days, the wild boars kept to the mountains, apparently because they could not hide themselves in areas cleared of brush by humans.

Now overgrown, the areas are attracting the boars.

A 2012 study by the Environment Ministry found boars in almost every area inside the 20-km exclusion zone.

“It is very likely that the area of their activities expanded since many people were evacuated (from the exclusion zone) and the number of boars captured is decreasing,” the ministry speculates.

In fiscal 2010, 3,736 boars were captured in Fukushima Prefecture, rising to a record high of 4,856 in fiscal 2012. More wild boars are also showing up in towns and cities outside the 20-km exclusion zone.

Meanwhile, the number of licensed hunters in Fukushima Prefecture has decreased by one-third, from 4,779 in fiscal 2010 to 3,328 in fiscal 2011, a trend that shows no sign of reversing.

A local official in charge of hunting said the idea that wild boar meat could be irradiated has reduced interest in bagging the wild animals among the already aging population of hunters.

The government has offered subsidies and prize money to try to resolve the problem, while the Environment Ministry plans to set up boar traps within 20 km of the nuclear plant starting in November.

The situation has also prompted prefectural officials and farmers, seeking to revitalize the prefecture's industry, to alleviate the damage by setting up electric fences and conducting large-scale hunts.

But "it is a cat-and-mouse game, because they reproduce quickly," said Hiroshi Sakai, manager of Fukushima Prefecture's nature conservation division.

Ideally, it would be better to go back into the mountains and create a buffer zone by cutting undergrowth, Sakai said, adding that the delay of decontamination activities in the mountains is hindering locals from managing the area.

Drop power-saving targets?

September 29, 2013

Power-saving targets likely to be dropped this winter

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/29/national/power-saving-targets-likely-to-be-dropped-this-winter/#.UkkqCVM0_9k

This winter is likely to be Japan's first without numerical power-saving targets since 2011, sources say. The March 2011 core meltdowns in Fukushima triggered power-saving efforts through most of the country after all 50 of the nation's viable atomic plants were shut down for safety inspections. This

resulted in rolling blackouts in some cities for several months because about 30 percent of the nation's electricity had come from nuclear power.

But now that the world's third-largest economy has returned to thermal power, sources say the government might not set any electricity-saving targets this winter, when demand tends to soar.

Nevertheless, the nine regional utilities with idle nuclear plants will still be expected to maintain a power reserve of 3 percent over anticipated demand this winter, the sources said. The tenth utility is in Okinawa but does not have use nuclear power.

All of the nation's atomic plants are idle and none are expected to be running this winter.

As it did this summer, the government will likely urge consumers and companies in regions served by the nine utilities to save power by following the practices adopted when the nuclear crisis began at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

The ability to avoid power shortages despite the total loss of atomic power can be credited to the utilities' return to thermal generation and to public conservation efforts.

According to the sources, based on estimates for this winter given to the government by the nine nuclear utilities, Hokkaido Electric Power Co. is projected to have a power surplus of 6.9 percent next February, when its service area is still expected to be stuck in winter.

Tohoku Electric Power Co. meanwhile is projected to have a surplus of 8.6 percent, with beleaguered Tokyo Electric Power Co. expected to have a surplus of 10.2 percent. Tepco serves nearly a third of the nation's population and most of its largest companies.

Chugoku Electric Power Co. will have a surplus of 8.4 percent, Shikoku Electric Power Co. 7.1 percent, Chubu Electric Power Co. 6.3 percent, and Hokuriku Electric Power Co. 6 percent, according to their estimates.

The surplus power at the two remaining utilities — Kansai Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. — is projected to stay at only 3 percent, but major power shortages are unlikely because additional power will be available from other utilities.

Changing the rules on compensation

October 1, 2013

Compensation to be paid even after evacuation orders lifted

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310010053>

By NORIYOSHI OHTSUKI/ Staff Writer

Residents forced from their homes by the Fukushima nuclear disaster will be eligible to receive compensation for psychological suffering up to a year after evacuation orders are lifted for their hometowns.

This is the first time the government has set such a deadline.

The policy was agreed to Oct. 1 by an evaluation committee for nuclear damage compensation disputes set up under the science ministry.

Evacuees receive 100,000 yen (\$1,020) a month in compensation. As it is tax-exempt and paid unconditionally, the payments are vital for evacuees who live in temporary housing or are trying to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

Currently, about 84,000 evacuees receive the compensation. Many depend on the money for monthly living expenses because of reduced means brought about by moving to new areas and inability to find jobs suited to their skills.

However, the move to cut off compensation after a year may be seen as adding to the suffering of evacuees, many of whom would probably not be able to live in their old neighborhoods, even if evacuation orders are lifted. That is, unless business establishments also return to provide employment as well as sell products needed for daily living.

Government surveys have also found that **many families with small children will not return home even if the evacuation order for their area is lifted due to concerns about the effects of radiation.**

Those factors led members of the evaluation committee to conclude that compensation would have to continue to be paid out even after evacuation orders are lifted because of the difficulties that evacuees would continue to face.

The compensation for psychological suffering would continue for a year regardless of whether the evacuees return to their homes or not. Payments could be extended beyond one year for families that have been separated because of the reactor meltdowns triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Evacuation orders for each area are expected to be lifted after radiation levels are lowered, and services such as water supply and electricity are restored.

Currently, 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have various levels of evacuation orders in place according to radiation levels in their jurisdictions. There are as yet no municipalities where such orders have been lifted.

TEPCO talks to Fukushima Assembly

September 30, 2013

TEPCO president meets Fukushima assembly members

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130930_38.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company President Naomi Hirose has pledged to ensure the dismantling of the crippled nuclear reactors at Fukushima Daiichi power plant proceeds without delay.

Hirose, Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, and other TEPCO executives attended a session of the Fukushima Prefectural Assembly on Monday, at the request of the assembly.

Hirose apologized for a series of problems at the nuclear plant. He said the company will make decontamination of radioactive wastewater its top priority and deploy management resources to deal with the issue.

Hirose noted that TEPCO has put aside an additional 1 trillion yen, or about 10 billion dollars, for this

purpose.

He said he would make certain that no necessary measures are cancelled or delayed just because the company wants to cut costs or streamline its businesses.

Assembly members asked whether there are enough tanks to store the radioactive wastewater. Hirose said the volume of tainted water will reach the plant's storage capacity of 800-thousand tons within the next 3 years. He says the company will take measures to ensure it does not build up to that level.

This is the second time that a TEPCO president has attended a Fukushima Prefectural Assembly session since the nuclear accident in 2011.

Clearly not worried

October 2, 2013

Japan fast-food chain to grow food 100 km from wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201310020098>

REUTERS

A Japanese fast-food chain has announced plans to grow rice and vegetables on a farm 100 km (60 miles) from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, site of the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Yoshinoya Holdings, which sells "gyudon," or sliced beef over rice, has formed a joint-venture with local farmers to grow onions, cabbage and rice for use in outlets across the country.

About 160,000 people nearest the plant were ordered to move out and the government established a 20-km compulsory evacuation zone after an earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 caused reactor meltdowns and contaminated water, vegetables and air.

A voluntary evacuation zone was extended to 30 km and separate areas were evacuated further afield depending on the wind direction.

The leaks prompted many consumers to shun products from Fukushima prefecture, which was once well-known for its fruit, mushrooms and vegetables.

The crops will be grown in Shirakawa, to the southwest of the plant, the company said. Yoshinoya said it would ensure that the vegetables were safe.

"We will employ local people in the factory. We think this will lead to support for reconstruction," Yoshinoya said in a statement.

Japan applies strict food monitoring and says that any products allowed on the market are safe. Despite these assurances, public fears have led to a drop in price for Fukushima produce and huge losses for farmers.

The operator of the plant, Tokyo Electric Power Co, is struggling to contain contaminated water at the site 240 km north of Tokyo. There have been multiple leaks and glitches over the last two and a half years.

Fishermen outraged

October 4, 2013

Fishermen furious over new radioactive water leak at Fukushima nuke plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131004p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Local fishermen and regional government heads have expressed outrage over a new leak of radioactive water from a storage tank at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant into the ocean.

"How long is Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) going to hold us fishermen back?" Masakazu Yabuki, 76, head of the Iwaki City Fisheries Cooperative Association, said about the repeated tainted water leaks. The association is planning to conduct trial fishing off Fukushima Prefecture on Oct. 10, for the first time since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

While Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared during an International Olympic Committee meeting last month that the effects of the contaminated water have been completely blocked within the bay that hosts

the plant, the latest water leak has further fueled distrust among fishermen and local government heads against TEPCO and the central government.

Regarding Abe's remarks, Yabuki said, "He was only referring to the data on radioactive materials after contaminated water was diluted by seawater. Fishery operators are enraged, saying the prime minister is making a fool of them."

Hiroyuki Sato, 57, head of the Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative which resumed test fishing at the end of September, said, "We've been fishing after confirming the safety of areas through monitor surveys. It's not like we are conducting test fishing in the belief of the prime minister's irresponsible remarks that the situation is 'under control.'"

Mayor Tamotsu Baba of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie, who is seeking to revive the town's Ukedo fishing port, said, "Are they really thinking about the contaminated water issue seriously? Every single incident becomes a matter of life or death for fishery operators, and could lead to harmful rumors."

Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma said, "This happened despite now being a crucial time for devising a recovery plan. It just makes us feel 'Not again' and discourages us from even making comments."

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato said at a hastily arranged meeting of managers at the prefectural government, "We have repeatedly demanded TEPCO ensure its risk management. We can only call the company sloppy."

The Fukushima Prefectural Government began a sampling survey on seawater near the plant's southern water discharge outlet on Oct. 3, for analysis of the concentrations of strontium and tritium -- radioactive materials that both emit beta rays

"Fukushima no koe"

October 4, 2013

Yoroku: Fukushima residents create video records for future generations

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131004p2a00m0na003000c.html>

The video opens with the evening arrival of children at an office of a Shinto shrine to practice dancing to the accompaniment of drums and flutes. Later, at a festival, the children perform 12 dances wearing colorful costumes and masks, clutching swords.

The breath of the performers and the warmth of the spectators are palpable in the 11 minute 40 second video, taken of the spring festival Fukuda Juni Kagura (12 sacred dances of Fukuda) at Suwa Shrine in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Shinchi. Takamasa Iwasaki, 27, who lives in the neighboring city of Soma, shot the video this past May.

Iwasaki bought a video camera as a result of his mounting desire to leave behind footage of everyday life in Fukushima after the triple disasters of 2011. Upon learning of a website calling for videos of Fukushima, he submitted his video of the festival.

The website, called "Fukushima no koe" (Voices of Fukushima), was set up in July by the non-profit organization OurPlanet-TV. It currently streams 21 videos, including interviews with families who evacuated from Fukushima and an elderly resident who has remained in the no-go zone.

One video from the site has been turned into a documentary movie titled "Iitate-mura: watashi no no kiroku (Iitate village: my records). The footage was taken by Kenichi Hasegawa, 60, a dairy farmer from the village of Iitate, and edited into a 70-minute film. It features a last supper before family members are torn apart for evacuation, a scene of a housewife in tears as she watches cows being taken away for culling, and exchanges between stricken plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., the village government and village residents.

It is only because the people taking the videos are themselves Fukushima residents that such footage has come to be. Hasegawa, too, took up his camera out of a sense of responsibility to leave such records for future generations.

OurPlanet-TV's Hajime Shiraishi, 44, says of the site, "We want people who live in Fukushima to record how everything has changed there since the nuclear disaster, and for the site to become a window through which people see it."

Efforts to record what's going on in Fukushima will no doubt help us amass valuable historical resources. ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

(Related link)

Fukushima no koe (Voices of Fukushima) website: <http://fukushimavoice.net/>

The "five-ampere life" journalist

October 5, 2013

Power-saving life changes Asahi reporter's attitude toward electricity

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310050016>

By KENICHIRO SAITO/ Staff Writer

Heeding the government's call to conserve electricity in the aftermath of the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, Asahi Shimbun staff writer Kenichiro Saito vowed to live a "five-ampere life."

Since the earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan and triggered three meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the Japanese government, along with the power utilities, have called on all citizens, both private and in business, to reduce their power consumption, especially in the summer, to avoid possible supply shortages.

Currently all of the nation's 50 nuclear reactors are offline as a result of the disaster and safety concerns, as well as for routine maintenance.

Saito started his new life in Tokyo a year and four months after the disaster.

The following is his report on that journey.

"You will not be able to live a normal life," I was told by an official from Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant and supplies power to the Tokyo area, when I said I wanted to reduce my "contract ampere" to five.

In a large part of Japan, basic electricity rates are determined according to the size of the electric current a customer is allowed to use at a given time, as measured in amperes. The current size is called "contract ampere."

When one signs a five-ampere contract, he or she can use up to five amperes of electricity, comparable to 500 watts, at a time.

While TEPCO has no basic charge for five-ampere contracts, the basic charge for 10-ampere contracts and 30-ampere contracts costs 273 yen (\$2.70) and 819 yen per month, respectively.

Those who choose to live on five-ampere contracts cannot use air conditioners or microwave ovens because they normally require more than 10 amperes each. Meanwhile, electric fans only require currents of 0.3 to 0.7 amperes. A washing machine needs four amperes to operate on a spin-dry cycle.

The total amount I paid for electricity over the past 14 months--July 2012 through August 2013--was 7,266 yen, which means I used only 266 kilowatt-hours of power during the period. That compares to what TEPCO defines as an average household, which requires a 30-ampere contract, consuming 290 kilowatt-hours of electricity a month.

As for home appliances, I currently have an electric toilet seat that has the warm-water spray feature and a washing machine. Though I don't suffer from hemorrhoids, I just couldn't give up the toilet; it's a luxury I have become accustomed to since I was a first-year elementary school student.

A washer is also essential for a single man like me in his 30's.

Hand washing dirty clothes is not an option as it is labor intensive and difficult for someone who works outside the home. Another reason I continue to use a washing machine is because I fear being told "you have become unclean since you stopped using electricity."

Another dilemma was the refrigerator; they typically consume the largest amount of power among home appliances. I was torn about whether to let it go. In the end, I gave it to a friend last winter and decided to buy only the amount of food I could consume at one time.

As a result of these measures, my electricity consumption fell to six kilowatt-hours or less each month since January. My monthly electricity costs have averaged 223.8 yen since then.

The five-ampere life has not only altered my electric bills but also my quality of life.

I think it would have been impossible to embrace the power-saving life for such a long period of time if I had given up all comforts just to reduce my power consumption.

The greatest change in my living situation came when I moved to a bay-side neighborhood. My previous apartment was located in an overcrowded residential area and poorly ventilated. Because the apartment only got a few hours of sunlight each morning, the inside temperatures fell at times to 4 degrees in winter. I could not use the air conditioner due to its high power consumption, so I was forced to bundle up against the cold. At times it was so cold, I could see my breath, and it felt as if my heart turned to ice.

In late January, I decided to move to a public housing complex facing Tokyo Bay. My new place received lots of sunlight and a nice ocean breeze. On a sunny day during the winter, the temperature would sometimes rise to more than 20 degrees even when it was less than 10 degrees outside. I can truly say nature made my life more comfortable there.

Toward the end of March, I decided to purchase a small secondhand motor home. Campers were once thought to be an extravagance, but lately, they have become popular with those looking for simple shelters that offer minimal luxuries.

I installed a solar panel on the roof and a storage battery inside. Thanks to such technology, I could charge my mobile phone battery as well as watch TV.

In the second summer of my five-ampere life, the temperatures hit record highs and with little wind, I began to doubt if nature was still on my side. On hot days, the temperature in my room rose to 32 degrees and then to 33 degrees, even after opening the windows. I eventually broke down and turned on an electric fan that consumes 0.7 ampere of power when running at full speed.

The hot summer also increased my desire for cool drinks to wet my parched throat, but I had no fridge. After deep contemplation, I bought a fridge with a freezer that could operate on solar power. I also purchased online a high-performance cooler, which looked similar to a safe. I made ice in my solar refrigerator only when necessary and stored food in the cooler because it required no electricity.

I have succeeded in further improving my quality of life in spite of the sweltering hot weather this summer.

Although I occasionally feel the futility of my endeavor, I have never felt a sense of loneliness. The other day, about 20 people who attended a lecture on saving power, which was sponsored by the nonprofit organization Pacific Asia Resource Center, visited my home. I showed them ways I keep power consumption low such as utilizing a camp lantern instead of a normal light and removing light bulbs in the corridor. Some of them eagerly took notes.

Since the power-saving life increased my awareness of how electric power is generated and who is forced to shoulder the burden, my use of gas and tap water has also declined.

I have also learned to appreciate everyday objects and essentials that do not require electricity, such as brooms that are made by skilled craftsmen, some of which are quite lissome and beautiful, and steamers that can reheat cooked rice.

In September, I was transferred to Nagoya where Chubu Electric Power Co. distributes power. Colleagues often asked me if I would continue my five-ampere life there and if so, for how long.

My answer is always the same: “As long as I live.”

The problems at the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have not yet been resolved, and the facility continues leaking radioactive water.

Under the current situation, I am reluctant to return to my old life and its wasteful ways of unlimited power consumption. Thus, the decision to continue a power-saving life is an extremely natural one for me.

My next goal is to boost my own personal energy production through the use of solar panels and storage batteries, in case I marry and have children someday.

Children plant trees on Fukushima levee

October 6, 2013

Trees planted on new Fukushima levee

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131006_22.html

About 3,000 residents and volunteers planted **20,000 seedlings on a newly built levee off the coast of Minamisoma City**, Fukushima Prefecture, on Sunday.

The event was organized by Minamisoma City and volunteer groups.

Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai said he hopes the trees will grow and protect people from tsunami.

Members of the all-girl pop group AKB48 also took part in the event.

The participants were divided into groups and planted the seedlings on mounds **about 200 meters from the coast**.

The levee contains rubble, wood and other debris from the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The seedlings are expected to grow to a height of more than 10 meters in about 10 years.

A 12-year-old junior high school student said she planted the young trees and prayed that everyone will be saved from tsunami.

Fukushima food: showcase in London

October 5, 2013

Fukushima produce promoted in London

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131006_12.html

Farmers from Fukushima Prefecture have showcased the safety of their produce at an event in London.

A Japanese festival called Japan Matsuri was held on Saturday in the British capital's Trafalgar Square.

Deputy Mayor of London Victoria Bowick spoke at the opening. She congratulated Japan on Tokyo's successful bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games.

Crowds thronged to 50 stalls selling Japanese foods.

Fukushima residents sold rice and fresh peach and apple juice.

The products had labels showing they passed tests for radioactive substances.

Head of a Japanese resident group Yoshio Mitsuyama said he wanted to promote the safety of Fukushima products in a city that attracts people from around the world. He said he was happy the products sold well.

The organizers say some proceeds will be used for children in Fukushima who have lost their parents.

Disbelief well spread

October 7, 2013

SURVEY: 76% don't believe Fukushima situation 'under control'; Abe support rate steady at 56%

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201310070064

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

About 76 percent of Japanese do not believe Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's contention that the radioactive water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is "under control," an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

Only 11 percent agree with Abe's assertion made in a speech in September before the International Olympic Committee to promote Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Summer Games, according to the survey conducted on Oct. 5-6.

Even among those who support the Abe Cabinet, only 18 percent believe Abe's contaminated-water statement, compared with 71 percent who do not.

Disbelief was even greater in the Tohoku region, which was hit hard by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that caused the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Only 10 percent think Abe's assessment is accurate, while 81 percent said the Fukushima situation is not under control.

Still, Abe continues to receive the backing of the public. The survey found his Cabinet had a support rating of 56 percent, down slightly from 57 percent in September.

Respondents were also asked about Abe's recent decision to raise the consumption tax rate from 5 percent to 8 percent next April. Fifty-one percent support the decision, compared with 38 percent who do not.

But only 39 percent believe the higher taxes will lead to stability in social security programs, while 47 percent doubt the effectiveness of the tax plan.

And just 24 percent support plans to further increase the consumption tax rate to 10 percent in October 2015, compared with 63 percent who are opposed. Among female respondents, 72 percent are against the tax-doubling measure.

Among those who support the initial tax hike to 8 percent, 45 percent favor a further increase to 10 percent, and 42 percent oppose the move.

The Abe administration has also put together a package of economic measures totaling 5 trillion yen (\$51 billion) to alleviate an expected decline in economic activity from the tax hike.

One measure is to eliminate one year ahead of schedule a special corporate tax to pay for rebuilding from the Tohoku natural disasters.

Only 27 percent of survey respondents support that measure, while 56 percent are opposed. Among respondents in the Tohoku region, 63 percent are against an early end to the special tax.

To encourage increases in jobs and wages, the Abe administration is considering lowering the corporate tax rate. Twenty-one percent of respondents believe the tax cut will have that effect, while 63 percent doubt the plan.

Seventy-seven percent of respondents are happy that Tokyo was chosen to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, compared with 16 percent who were disappointed at the IOC's decision.

When asked how hosting the Games would affect rebuilding from the Tohoku natural disasters, only 37 percent said reconstruction efforts will be accelerated. Forty-six percent said rebuilding work will take a back seat to hosting the Olympics.

The national telephone survey by The Asahi Shimbun received valid responses from 1,897 individuals selected through a random dialing process.

First rice harvest within 20km radius of plant

October 8, 2013

Farmers near Fukushima plant begin rice harvesting for first time since accident

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131008p2a00m0na009000c.html>

TAMURA, Fukushima -- Farmers began to harvest rice here on Oct. 8 in fields within a radius of 20 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant for the first time since the outbreak of the nuclear crisis.

Hisao Tsuboi, 63, and his 60-year-old wife Chikako -- a farming family in the Miyakoji district of the Fukushima Prefecture city of Tamura -- were delighted to be surrounded by gold-colored rice ears. They said, "We can harvest good rice because it was hot this summer and temperatures here on higher ground fluctuate between warm and cool."

The Tsubois expect to reap more than 12 metric tons of rice -- Hitomebore (love at first sight) short-grain variety as well as Chiyonishiki and other varieties. After going through inspections for radiation, some of the harvested rice will become part of the government's stockpiled rice while the remaining grain will be sold directly to those customers in the Kanto region they knew well prior to the outbreak of the nuclear crisis.

More than half of the residents in the Miyakoji district, which is located within a radius of 20 kilometers from the troubled nuclear plant, are either full-time or part-time farmers.

The district was reorganized into an "area preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders" and decontamination work on residences was completed in June this year, but only 20 percent of the 119 households are staying at their homes. Only three households in the Miyakoji district, including the Tsubois, harvested rice there this time.

NHK video : Reclaiming Toxic Land

October 8, 2013

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201310080500.html>

Reclaiming Toxic Land

Newsline video

After 3.11 radiation contaminated the foliage and the soil
Story of a young Fukushima farmer who is not giving up (cut the trees, removed the soil, treated the new soil with potassium hoping his cows will be grazing again in the Spring)

What about breaking-up TEPCO?

October 9, 2013

INTERVIEW: LDP's Oshima says TEPCO breakup an option

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310090079>

REUTERS

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party will make proposals this month on how to handle the embattled operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, including the possible break-up of the giant utility, a senior party policymaker said on Oct. 9.

Tadamori Oshima, head of LDP's task force on reconstruction after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that wrecked the reactors at the Fukushima plant, told Reuters the government needs to do more in dealing with floods of contaminated water at the plant and decommissioning the facility.

He declined to express a clear opinion on the controversial question of whether to break up Tokyo Electric Power Co., but said: "It's time for us to make a decision, not in order to save TEPCO, but to pave the way toward reconstruction."

The current set-up is not working, Oshima said in an interview, as progress is hindered by TEPCO remaining in charge of all the work.

TEPCO has lost \$27 billion since the disaster at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and faces massive liabilities as it decommissions the facility, compensates tens of thousands of evacuees and pays for decontamination of an area nearly the size of Connecticut.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has promised that the government would take primary responsibility for containing the contaminated water at Fukushima, telling the world the "situation is under control."

At the Fukushima plant, some 800 tons of groundwater flow into the basements of the wrecked reactor buildings every day, mixing with highly radioactive water used to cool melted fuel rods.

After months of denials, TEPCO in July admitted contaminated water was flowing into the nearby Pacific Ocean.

It also since found that 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from one of hundreds of hastily-built storage tanks.

Last week, TEPCO said another 430 liters of water overflowed from another tank.

In the latest mishap, six Fukushima workers were exposed to a leak of highly radioactive water after one of them mistakenly detached a pipe.

HEATED DEBATE

The government effectively nationalized TEPCO last year with a taxpayer-funded rescue.

But there is heated debate over direct government involvement in the company and whether to split it up, such as by spinning off the Fukushima clean-up and letting the remainder of TEPCO focus on its traditional business of generating electricity for millions of homes and businesses in the Tokyo area.

Oshima, a former LDP vice president, reportedly last month proposed breaking off the function of decommissioning the wrecked Fukushima plant--a process that is expected to take at least 30 years and cost more than \$100 billion.

He declined to comment on what he proposed, saying it was a private letter to Abe that wasn't meant to be disclosed.

There is a push to enact a "special measures law" that would let the government take a more direct role, as it is now authorized only to participate in research and development on the water issue.

Oshima said careful negotiations are under way with a wide variety of parties, including government ministries and the LDP's junior coalition partner, New Komeito, on such issues as stronger government involvement and potential reorganization.

TEPCO has said it is not in a position to comment on its future structure, and aims to return to profitability this financial year.

The bureaucracy is pushing back, government officials say. The Finance Ministry fears that breaking up TEPCO would hand another large bill to taxpayers, while the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which regulates electric utilities, worries a break-up could have ripple effects through the industry.

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi said this week that a special measures law was not needed as the current legal framework allows the government to be more involved in TEPCO.

Fishing is safe

October 11, 2013

Whitebait catches resume in disaster-hit Fukushima

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/japan.html>

Fishermen have resumed catching whitebait in waters off Fukushima Prefecture for the first time since the nuclear accident in March 2011.

Thirty-four fishing boats set out early Friday from Matsukawaura Port in the city of Soma. They began arriving back to unload the catches around 9AM.

A local fisheries cooperative decided to resume catching whitebait on the grounds that hardly any radioactive substances have been detected in a series of tests conducted since the nuclear accident.

Cooperative officials say they tested the fish for radiation before and after boiling and processing, and found no trace of radioactive materials.

Now that the whitebait has been found safe, it will be distributed to local supermarkets and fish stores on Monday. The fish will be shipped to Tokyo's Tsukiji market as well.

The cooperative resumed trawl fishing in some areas on September 25th. It had been suspended after radioactive water was found to be leaking into the ocean from the damaged nuclear plant.

Whitebait fishing can be conducted in relatively shallow water, so many small boats will be able to take part.

Cooperative officials are hoping that the first commercial catches since the accident will pave the way for the resumption of full-scale whitebait fishing.

Securing land difficult, workers scarce

Survey: Housing projects delayed for more than 10,000 evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/analysis/AJ201310110006>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Problems such as difficulties in securing land and shortages of public employees and bidders are cited by governments in an Asahi Shimbun survey showing about 30 percent of the housing projects for evacuees of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami will be delayed.

The central and local governments plan to build 28,017 public housing units in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures in northeastern Japan for disaster victims after they leave temporary housing by fiscal 2015.

However, construction of about 9,000 homes, or more than 30 percent of the public housing projects, will likely not be completed by the scheduled date, leaving more than 10,000 people without places to call "home."

The Asahi Shimbun asked Iwate and Fukushima prefectures and 44 municipalities, which plan to construct public housing units as part of disaster recovery efforts, about prospects for completion as of the end of August. In Miyagi Prefecture, the housing projects are mostly being undertaken by municipalities.

Of all 28,017 units planned, only 448, or 1.5 percent, had been built in a prefecture and 11 municipalities as of the end of August. In contrast, the prospects are dim for 9,074 housing units, or 32.3 percent, in two prefectures and 17 municipalities, for completion by the end of fiscal 2014.

Of those, 3,745 units, or 13.3 percent, will be completed by the end of fiscal 2016 or later, the survey found.

Respondents failed to specify the completion date for a total of 5,329 units, or 19 percent, due to the difficulty in securing land.

Asked for reasons for the delays, two prefectures and 16 municipalities--the largest in number--cited "difficulty in securing land," followed by "a shortage of public employees," which was cited by nine municipalities.

Two prefectures and nine municipalities cited "a lack of materials and difficulty soliciting bidders due to difficulty securing workers" and seven municipalities gave as a reason "a delay in land reallocation and other land improvement projects."

The Board of Audit, also concerned about the slow progress in public housing projects, examined the status in 56 municipalities in eight prefectures, including Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, as of June.

Of a total of about 25,000 planned disaster recovery public housing units, only 14.8 percent were expected to be completed by the end of this fiscal year, the board found.

LACK OF LAND, WORKERS, MATERIALS BLAMED

In Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, where 70 percent of the planned 1,220 public housing units will not likely be completed by fiscal 2015, a 39-year-old man remains concerned about his family's future.

With the company employee's house having been washed away by the 2011 tsunami, he now lives in a temporary housing unit in front of the Kamaishi city hall with his 36-year-old wife and 4-year-old son.

The unit consists of two 4.5 tatami-mat-sized rooms and a kitchen. With only a small storage area available, there is not enough space for his son to play with his toys.

Yet, he said he does not feel comfortable building a new home on the site where his former house stood before the tsunami swept it away. He hopes to move his family into a four-story public housing complex being built as part of disaster-recovery efforts, scheduled to be constructed near where he lives.

Bidding for construction of the 40 units in the complex, however, was canceled twice, forcing the completion date to be put off for six months. It was originally scheduled to be completed in September 2014.

“How long do I have to live in provisional housing?” the man asked. “I cannot possibly make future plans.”

One reason for the bidding cancellation was the unrealistic target completion date. Construction companies found the timetable set by the city, to be completed in 12 months, too short.

With an increase in reconstruction demands in the disaster-hit areas, it became difficult to follow work schedules as smoothly as before the 2011 disaster, due to difficulties in securing workers and materials.

A city official in charge of the project is worried that bidding problems will continue for a while.

Some municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, which host evacuees from the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, also face a serious shortage of land for housing development.

In Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, which plans to build 4,000 disaster-recovery housing units in its 70 districts on high ground or inland, only 40 units in two districts have been completed.

With so many districts involved, the city has had to deal with complicated and time-consuming procedures ranging from land acquisition and reclamation to construction.

“We have support workers coming from outside the prefecture, but they are not familiar with the area. We can’t even acquire the necessary land,” a city official said.

(This article was written by Tateki Iwai and Shiori Tabuchi.)

Evacuation order soon to be lifted in Tamura?

October 12, 2013

Worlds apart: A fence in Tomioka perches on the border of the no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. | KYODO

District’s evacuation order may be lifted

Any residents returning to Tamura area to get dosimeters

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/12/national/districts-evacuation-order-may-be-lifted/#.UlpMlFM0_9k

JJI

The government hopes to partly lift its evacuation order starting Nov. 1 at a district within the 20-km no-go zone around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, according to sources.

The government will present a plan to lift the order for the Miyakoji district, located in the city of Tamura in Fukushima Prefecture, at a meeting with residents Monday, the sources said.

The period in which Miyakoji residents are allowed to visit the area for long stays to prepare for their permanent return is set to expire at the end of October.

The long-stay program was launched in August following the completion in Miyakoji of work to remove radioactive substances emitted by the March 2011 triple meltdowns at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. nuclear plant.

Miyakoji would be the first district to see the evacuation order lifted among those falling within the no-go zone designated by the government soon after the nuclear crisis was triggered by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami. If the order is removed, Miyakoji residents would be able to return to their homes without restrictions.

But local concerns about an early lifting of the evacuation order remain strong. If many residents express caution at Monday's meeting, the government may extend the long-stay program and delay lifting the order until December or later, the sources said.

Miyakoji is currently an area in which preparations are being made for a possible lifting of the evacuation order and the permanent return of residents. The district was reclassified in April 2012, as the annual radiation dose per person was found to be 20 millisieverts or less.

Officials from the Cabinet Office and the Environment Ministry, as well as Tamura Mayor Yukei Tomitsuka, will take part in Monday's meeting, the sources said.

The central and municipal governments will propose lifting the evacuation order and will then solicit residents' opinions. The government and the municipality will also explain support measures, **including a plan to distribute dosimeters to those returning home.**

The city will further present a progress report on setting up a makeshift shopping area in Miyakoji and explain plans to call on a major convenience store chain to establish an outlet in the district, the sources said.

The central and local governments will consider further support measures if they are requested by local residents.

Tepco to check port

kyodo

Tepco said it will reinforce radiation monitoring inside the small man-made harbor of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, as the concentration of radioactive cesium is rising.

For a week from Friday, Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to check the cesium levels of the seawater at five points, including at the entrance to the port, on a daily basis, officials from the utility said Friday.

Tepco has detected rising cesium levels near the water intake of the power plant's reactor 2, one of three units that suffered meltdowns in March 2011. An undersea "silt fence" around the intake is supposed to prevent the spread of contamination.

Seawater samples taken from inside the fenced off area Tuesday were found to contain 90 becquerels of cesium per liter. Samples collected Wednesday contained 1,200 becquerels and those taken Thursday around 970 becquerels, Tepco said.

Radiation levels outside the silt fence have also been rising.

Preserve or not preserve?

October 15, 2013

Survivors debate whether to preserve symbols of 3/11 disaster

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201310150047

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SANRIKU, Miyagi Prefecture--Dangerous pieces of the disaster management center building swamped by the 2011 tsunami were removed, but calls have grown to dismantle the remaining rust-colored metal frames and girders of the hulking structure.

However, the site is also the place where Hiromi Miura, 53, visits once every three days to "enjoy a conversation" with her husband over beer and sake.

Miura's husband, Takeshi, was a 51-year-old town official when the tsunami struck in March 2011. He was on the second floor of the center using the community wireless system to urge residents to flee just before the waves swept him away. His body has not been found.

"I've heard the building, the only place where I can chat with you, will be torn down. How will we handle this?" Hiromi Miura asked the spirit of her missing husband in front of the tsunami-wrecked building.

Survivors of the quake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan two and a half years ago have been debating over the ships, buildings, vehicles and other objects that have become symbols of the disaster.

Some want to keep them as memorials and education tools for future generations. Others want them removed to erase reminders of all the pain, suffering and death that shattered their communities.

Forty-two people at the Minami-Sanriku disaster management center were killed or remain missing. The town government intended to preserve the remains of the building as a monument to the tsunami victims.

But some bereaved families demanded the building be dismantled, saying it was bringing back painful memories. The town government in September decided to demolish it.

In summer last year, citizens submitted three petitions: two calling for scrapping or delaying the dismantling plan, and one seeking the removal of the building as soon as possible.

In the end, the town determined that preserving the building would hamper surrounding reconstruction work, and decided to tear down the structure.

In other parts of Miyagi Prefecture, symbols of the disaster are disappearing.

One famous image from the disaster was the No. 18 Kyotoku Maru fishing boat that was swept 750 meters inland in Kesenuma.

The Kesenuma city government had worked to conserve the ship as a symbol, but the ship's owner in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, sought to demolish it because residents said they did not want to see it anymore.

Dismantling work started in early September.

In March last year, the city government of Ishinomaki, also in Miyagi Prefecture, removed a sightseeing bus that had ended up on the roof of a community center building. Citizens complained that the vehicle reminded them of what they do not want to remember.

But in other disaster areas, aggressive efforts have been made to preserve the symbols.

The Taro tourist hotel in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, was hit hard by the tsunami two years ago. Its walls on the first and second floors were swept away, leaving only the building's metal frames.

The six-story hotel is trying to make the facility a tourist attraction for people who hope to learn more about the devastation. Visitors on the top floor can watch a video that recorded the tsunami heading toward the hotel.

Miyako Mayor Masanori Yamamoto plans to buy the hotel and preserve it as a disaster-preparedness education center. He said he wants to pass down the horrors of the tsunami to future generations.

The Otsuchi town government in Iwate Prefecture is attempting to restore a once-removed sightseeing boat that had washed up on a roof of a tourist inn.

The government took away the Hamayuri ship two months after the March 2011 disaster. But some citizens said it should be restored as educational material to show the height of the tsunami.

The municipal government in July last year began soliciting donations for the project.

Debate over whether to maintain symbols of natural disasters, wars or accidents is not new in Japan.

The Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima, an iconic symbol of the 1945 U.S. atomic bombing of the city, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996.

But before 1966, when the Hiroshima city assembly adopted a resolution calling for the building to be preserved as a memorial, local residents argued over whether it should remain.

One thing that led to the city's resolution was a study that showed the dome could be maintained with reinforcement work.

But in Nagasaki, the Urakami Cathedral hit by the U.S. atomic bomb was demolished after the end of World War II. A new cathedral was constructed on its site.

“Even today, some people say it is regrettable that (the cathedral was replaced),” said Yuichi Seirai, a novelist who was born and raised near the Urakami Cathedral.

But Seirai, who wrote the book “Bakushin” (Ground zero) about the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, also noted the costs needed by a local government to preserve monuments of a disaster or war.

“Unless the central government chooses which symbols to preserve, the ‘messages’ for posterity will vanish,” Seirai said.

In Tokyo, Japan Airlines Co. has kept traces of one of the worst air disasters in history to remind employees and executives of the importance of ensuring safety.

A JAL jumbo jet crashed into the village of Ueno, Gunma Prefecture, in 1985, killing 520 aboard.

Bereaved family members initially asked JAL to preserve the wreckage, but the airline was cool toward the idea.

But after a series of JAL safety blunders surfaced in 2005, the company decided to exhibit the remains of the jet at its Safety Promotion Center near Haneda Airport in Tokyo.

“Once the remains are cleared away, it becomes impossible to restore them again,” said Kuniko Miyajima, 66, one of the bereaved family members. “What is important is to pass them down to future generations.”

Miyami raw oysters back on tables

October 17, 2013

3/11 aftermath: Famed Miyagi raw oysters finally back

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201310170005>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

ONAGAWA, Miyagi Prefecture--Raw oysters from this part of northeastern Japan, a local specialty, are back on dinner tables for the first time since the earthquake and tsunami disaster more than two years ago.

The shellfish from Miyagi Prefecture are generally small and prized for their delicate taste.

Fishermen in the Oura district here resumed shipments on Oct. 15. Local workers began shucking 200 kilograms of oysters that were landed a day earlier at a processing plant completed in May.

They flipped open shells to reveal puffy flesh with practiced movements.

“At long last,” said third-generation fish culture worker Yoshishiro Komatsu, 39, with a delighted sigh. “We’ve waited a long time for this moment.”

Local fishermen sought to rebuild the oyster processing plant in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, but **had to wait because so many other projects took priority in the devastated landscape.**

Abe promises to dispel rumors about fish

October 19, 2013

Abe to address rumors about seafood contamination

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131019_26.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has promised to work to dispel rumors about seafood caught off Fukushima Prefecture being contaminated with radiation.

Abe visited Matsukawaura port in Fukushima Prefecture on Saturday. He has visited areas affected by the March 2011 disaster almost every month.

Local fishery cooperative officials briefed him on the experimental fishing that resumed on September 25th. Fishing had been suspended due to radioactive wastewater leaks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Abe tasted octopus and squid caught near the port as well as whitebait that is being caught on an experimental basis.

He said he would like people across Japan to know that seafood caught off Fukushima is good and safe. He said the government will publicize the safety of the seafood.

Abe later visited Shinchi Town, where he was briefed on a project to move the whole community to higher ground after it was severely affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

He offered words of encouragement to the townspeople living in temporary housing who have agreed to move to higher ground collectively. He said they had made a difficult decision, but that their future is now in sight. Abe said the government will do its best to rebuild Fukushima.

Abe then visited a kitchen utility factory that resumed production in a former no-entry zone in Minamisoma City.

Abe told reporters that fishing has resumed, although on an experimental basis, and tests have found all seafood to be safe. However, he said the fact remains that fishermen and farmers in Fukushima are suffering from rumors with no factual basis. Abe said he will continue to work to disseminate accurate information that Fukushima's fishery and agricultural products are safe.

First fish auctions in Fukushima since 3/11

October 19, 2013

Post-accident fish auctions in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131019_19.html

Auctions for fish caught off Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture took place on Saturday for the first time since the March 2011 nuclear accident.

The bidding was held at **4 wholesale markets in Fukushima Prefecture.**

More than 100 wholesalers gathered at 6 AM at the central wholesale market in Iwaki, where 400 kilograms of marine products were put up for bid. The seafood represented 30 percent of the entire haul from Friday's test fishing off the prefecture.

No radioactive materials were found in any of the samples that included octopuses and horse crabs as well as the local specialty, greeneye fish.

The greeneye sold for 800 yen, or about 8 dollars, per kilogram. That is 20 to 30 percent higher than the same type of fish from other prefectures.

A wholesaler, Yuji Kanari, said he is very happy as he had been looking forward to dealing with locally-caught fish again.

The marine products were then delivered to retailers across Fukushima Prefecture.

The fish have been put on sale with a certificate showing radiation test results.

At a fish store in Iwaki, a man who bought horse crabs said he came in the morning as he was anxious to eat local food.

High Radioactivity in Groundwater (NHK)

October 18, 2013

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201310181505.html>

High Radioactivity in Groundwater

Newsline feature, NHK

About the contamination of groundwater at Fukushima Daiichi.

Fishermen worry – Now in Iwaki test fishing has started (“we are 70% worried about the contaminated water”) Fishing is only allowed at least 40km away from the plant and only 16 kinds of seafood can be caught. Fishing cooperatives have set their own safety limits (twice as strict as Gov’t standards)

Fukushima mothers at Carnegie Hall

October 20, 2013

Fukushima moms croon at Carnegie

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/20/national/fukushima-moms-croon-at-carnegie/#.UmQDBFM0_9k

NEW YORK – Around 140 members of the Fukushima Mothers’ Chorus Association performed at the second Japan-U.S. Chorus Festival at Carnegie Hall in New York City on Saturday.

“To sing our songs to the world in this grand hall with our heads held high was wonderful. We will rebuild Fukushima,” Yuko Miyake, who chairs the chorus, said during an interview following the event.

The chorus performed a selection of songs in Japanese, including the traditional Fukushima folk song “Aizu Bandai-san” and “Soshite, Haru,” a song celebrating the four seasons of Fukushima.

“The language didn’t make a bit of difference. The emotion showed through,” said Chris Murphy, who was in the audience.

Haiku poet Madoka Mayuzumi read the lyrics to “Soshite, Haru,” which she wrote, on stage at the event. She also recited haiku written by residents of areas affected by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Four representatives of Fukushima also greeted the audience. One was Ryoka Endo, 16, who said she screamed when she thought she would drown in the tsunami.

“I realized the importance of my life. I think we should all remember how important our everyday lives are,” she told them.

The Fukushima chorus was joined by The Harmony Celebration Chorus, a local female barber shop quartet-style group, and Choir TOMO, a mixed chorus formed by Mike Shirota, a Sendai-born music director who organizes the choir festival.

At the end of the concert, all of the nearly 250 singers taking part gathered onstage to sing “Climb Every Mountain” and “Ave Maria” together.

Harmony Celebration Chorus singer Audrey Mullinnix called singing with the group “the experience of a lifetime.”

The chorus association was founded in Fukushima Prefecture in 1966 and now has 32 groups and around 750 members.

Naoto Matsumura's exhibition in Nagoya

October 22, 2013

Photos highlight the tragedy that befell livestock, pets after Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310220010>

By RYUZO NAKANO/ Staff Writer

NAGOYA--Naoto Matsumura kept a visual record of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. But the images he snapped are not of neighbors and others who were forced from their homes.

His photos are of the livestock and pets that were left to fend for themselves after residents were ordered to evacuate as radiation spewed from nuclear reactors.

Tens of thousands of animals were left to their fate after areas were designated no-entry zones because of the crisis triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The 54-year-old is now showing his photos at a gallery here.

Matsumura lived in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, and worked as a farmer and operator of a local construction company before the nuclear accident.

Immediately after the crisis unfolded, he evacuated to safety but returned to his home several days later to take care of domestic animals and pets that were left behind in his neighborhood.

His house is located only 12 kilometers from the stricken nuclear plant and was designated as part of the no-entry zone until March this year.

"When I (returned and) approached the animals, they mooed and meowed. (They were so happy to see me)," he said. "That's why I stayed in my house."

About 70 photos are on display. They include images of Matsumura feeding cats and ostriches, and skeletal cattle that starved to death.

Even now, he is taking care of 50 head of cattle, two ostriches, a pony and several dogs and cats. His house has electricity, but no gas and running water. He gets around that problem by using gas cartridges for cooking and taking water from a spring.

Matsumura said he had taken steps to stop the cats and dogs from breeding.

The no-entry zone was within a 20-kilometer radius of the nuclear plant. It is estimated that 3,400 head of cattle, 30,000 pigs and 35,000 dogs and cats were abandoned. A good number were killed and disposed of by the central and local governments. Others starved to death.

Distressed by what happened, Matsumura set up a nonprofit organization, "Ganbaru Fukushima" (Struggling Fukushima) in spring 2012, and is seeking support.

"It could take decades, or even hundreds of years for Fukushima to return to how it was before the nuclear disaster. I will go on feeding the animals until I die. I want visitors (to the exhibition) to see the photos and know that the reconstruction has not progressed," Matsumura said.

The exhibition at Gallery Tamamiseum, in Nagoya's Naka Ward, runs until Oct. 22. Admission is free.

Would UNESCO endorsement be enough to correct rumours?

October 23, 2013

Japan hopes culinary honor helps Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131023_21.html

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga says he hopes UNESCO endorsement of the heritage value of Japan's traditional cuisine helps counter rumors about the safety of food from Fukushima.

Suga told reporters on Wednesday that traditional Japanese food culture is grounded in a spiritual respect for nature. He said those values are sure to be passed on to future generations if they are formally recognized by the UN body in December as an intangible cultural asset.

Suga said food producers in Fukushima Prefecture have been hit hard by rumors about food safety following the 2011 nuclear disaster.

He said UNESCO recognition of Japanese cuisine would help the government to correct that information.

Meiji products not safe enough for China

October 25, 2013

Meiji to end baby formula sales in China amid Fukushima fallout

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201310250054>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Food producer Meiji Co. said Oct. 24 that it will withdraw from the Chinese baby formula market after its current stock runs out due to plummeting sales since the onset of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The company blamed intensifying competition. The backlash over the Senkaku Islands issue also contributed to sales in China falling to about one-third of its peak performance.

Meiji began baby formula sales in China in 1993. It became widely recognized as one of the safe foreign brands after hazardous materials were found in domestic products.

However, exports from Japan were prohibited after foot-and-mouth disease spread among cattle in Miyazaki Prefecture in 2010.

The accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, set off by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, only prolonged the ban.

In 2011, Meiji switched to exports from Australia, which pushed up transportation costs. However, Chinese, fearful of radioactive contamination, stayed away from Meiji products.

Local newspapers said worsening Japan-China relations also affected Meiji's sales amid stiff competition from rivals in Europe and New Zealand.

Japanese food, known for its reliability, was considered one of the nation's promising exports to China. However, China has banned food from many eastern Japanese prefectures since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Meiji said it intends to resume baby formula sales if exports from Japan are permitted. However, the Japanese and Chinese governments have not made progress in lifting the ban.

(This article was written by Masanobu Furuya in Tokyo and Tokuhiko Saito in Guangzhou.)

What evacuees in Niigata think of possible restart

October 24, 2013

Fukushima evacuee family on edge as TEPCO prepares to restart Niigata nuke plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131024p2a00m0na015000c.html>

NIIGATA -- Fukushima resident Takako Sugiura and her family are one of many families with small children who fled from Fukushima Prefecture to Niigata following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011. While the 43-year-old mother and her family try to settle down in a new environment, plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is preparing to restart two nuclear reactors in Niigata.

"I will draw (the character) Anpanman for you. I know you like him," Sugiura's 9-year-old daughter Hina said to her 1-year-old brother Ryota while they played inside their house in Niigata, where the family had fled from their hometown in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture. The children's father, Seiji, works in Fukushima and comes to see the family on weekends.

The 43-year-old father ran a physical therapy clinic in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, but had to close it down as the family left their hometown in the wake of the 2011 disaster. Although Seiji and his family fled outside the prefecture, he returned to Minamisoma three months after the disaster to help Fukushima residents. Seiji travels around the prefecture, visiting temporary housing units to offer physical therapy while searching for an opportunity to open up a clinic in his hometown. Takako respects her husband's will and supports him in Niigata with their two children.

"I remember how I could see the ocean so blue in my hometown. I hope to go back someday with my children," Seiji said.

The Sugiura family spent nights in their car for a week after the earthquake and tsunami hit northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011 while fleeing from Fukushima. They reached an evacuation shelter in Niigata on March 18. They found out that Takako was expecting another child in August that year, but the mother was worried about the baby's health as she traveled across Fukushima Prefecture as radiation levels were high.

She promised herself that she would save the baby's life no matter what happens. In February 2012, Takako gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Just as the mother started to think it might be best for the family to stay in Niigata, on Sept. 27 TEPCO requested the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) conduct a safety review as it hoped to restart the No. 6 and 7 reactors at TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.

Some 5,000 evacuees are still living in Niigata, most of them believed to be mothers and children just like the Sugiura family. Takako can't help but wonder if TEPCO realizes that the company is causing turmoil to evacuees.

"I can't go back (to Fukushima) even though I want to," Hina wrote in a survey conducted by her current school in Niigata. Takako wonders where her two children will call "home" as their evacuation continues.

Kids in Fukushima are less strong and more prone to obesity

October 25, 2013

Fukushima children's strength declining

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131025_13.html

Children in nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture are showing reduced physical strength due to prolonged restrictions on outdoor activities.

The prefectural government says that following the March 2011 nuclear accident, 465 public schools

restricted their students' outdoor activities, fearing radiation exposure. The number accounts for around 60 percent of all government-run schools in the prefecture.

Many cut gym classes on school grounds or shortened outdoor recess periods.

But a recent survey found that nearly 90 percent of the schools had lifted all such restrictions.

Prefectural officials say progress in decontamination work and increasing support among parents has led to lifting the restrictions.

But a nationwide assessment of children's physical strength conducted by the education ministry last year showed that **elementary school pupils in Fukushima scored lower in all categories than in pre-disaster tests.**

Another survey found that the obesity ratio for Fukushima children is higher than the national average in almost all age brackets.

The officials point out that some parents are still concerned about exposure to radiation and feel reluctant to let their children play outdoors.

They are working to address these concerns and are stepping up efforts to improve children's physical strength.

Fukushima chef at the Elysee Palace

October 25, 2013

Fukushima chef raises residents' morale with trip to France

by Caroline Taix

AFP-JIJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/25/national/fukushima-chef-raises-residents-morale-with-trip-to-france/#.UmuWC1M0_9k

PARIS – Arriving in France with a suitcase full of smoked chicken and wasabi from Fukushima Prefecture, chef Harutomo Hagi was a man on a mission.

Armed with a sheaf of test certificates vouching for the safety of the produce in the wake of the Fukushima meltdowns, the chef was in Paris to show the world what Fukushima has to offer.

“Even when they smiled, the farmers were sad,” Hagi, 37, said, explaining that products from the area had become tainted in the eyes of consumers and were being sold at half the price they fetched before the disaster.

The situation was so bad, he said, that he thought “it was all over.”

Large swaths of the area were evacuated after the earthquake and tsunami two years ago triggered the man-made calamity at the Fukushima No. 1 power station.

Three of the plant's six reactors went into meltdown and spread radiation over several prefectures and the ocean.

For months afterward, Hagi's restaurant in the city of Iwaki, around 30 km from the power plant, was deserted as people feared everything in the region had been contaminated.

Many fled this key agricultural area, which now has the highest proportion of fallow land in Japan. But Hagi opted not to join the exodus.

On the contrary, he decided that not only would he stay, but that he would cook with products exclusively from the region.

The publicity generated by his initiative turned around the fortunes of his own restaurant, and now the chef is determined to do what he can to help others revive their livelihoods, too.

And so, over the past month, the chef has found himself in the kitchens of the presidential Elysee Palace in Paris and the royal residence of Prince Albert in Monaco.

Invited to Europe by the Club des Chefs des Chefs — whose elite membership comprises the current personal chefs of heads of state — Hagi spent two weeks at the Elysee, followed by a stint in Monaco.

He met both President Francois Hollande and Prince Albert, and served up Japanese dishes using European produce.

In Paris, he also cooked with chef Thierry Marx at Sur Mesure, a restaurant at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel that holds two Michelin stars.

The chef speaks with pride of Fukushima's "baby peaches, tiny and sweet" and the smoked chicken from the region that he brought with him.

"I was very moved to come to France with this chicken," he said, adding that Paris is important because it's one of the gastronomic capitals of the world.

Gilles Bragard of the Club des Chefs des Chefs said the visit would help lift the spirits of restaurateurs and farmers in Fukushima.

Although most of Fukushima Prefecture was unaffected by the crisis, produce prices have plunged and people are still shunning food with Fukushima labels.

"If the French eat these products, the Japanese can regain confidence and buy them again," Bragard said.

Hagi, who has just returned to Japan, was an "ambassador for the products of Fukushima. . . . It has become his crusade," Bragard added.

The visit also served as a welcome boost to Hagi's own morale.

"All these chefs gave me the courage to continue. I feel reinvigorated," he said.

"We must motivate people to continue rebuilding Fukushima," he said.

**See also NHK video :
October 22, 2013**

A Feast from Fukushima

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201310230812.html>

More flexibility on compensation

October 26, 2013

Panel willing to extend compensation period for Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310260046>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A government panel will be more flexible on providing compensation for psychological damage to Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees who are relying on the payments while their hometowns are decontaminated and rebuilt.

The one-year limit on the compensation payments after evacuation orders are lifted will remain, in principle. But the evaluation committee for nuclear damage compensation disputes said the period can be extended if the circumstances require it.

Specifically, the panel said sufficient social infrastructure and a job environment should be in place in the affected municipalities before any decision is made to cut off the compensation.

The committee's proposal compiled on Oct. 25 also said residents will not be required to return to their hometowns to be eligible for the payments.

Additional compensation payments for lost wages or decreased business would continue even after evacuation orders are lifted, according to the panel.

The science ministry committee will include the measures in new compensation guidelines to be compiled before the end of the year.

Evacuees receive 100,000 yen (\$1,030) a month in psychological suffering compensation. The money is tax-exempt and paid unconditionally.

Currently, about 84,000 evacuees receive the payments.

Many people stuck in temporary housing rely on the payments. Others use the money for monthly living expenses because relocating has reduced their income and made it difficult to secure jobs suited to their skills.

The committee's proposal also allows for a further extension of the compensation period if psychological suffering continues under special circumstances.

Some panel members had said the one-year extension, proposed on Oct. 1, was too short considering the lack of essential social infrastructure in many of the municipalities affected by the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

They also raised concerns about the difficulties residents would face in returning home if there were no jobs in the community or if businesses that sell daily goods and services had not returned.

Yoshihisa Nomi, professor of law at Gakushuin University who heads the panel, indicated that consideration would be given if new problems emerged when the evacuees return to their homes.

Evacuation orders for the areas are expected to be lifted after radiation levels are lowered and services such as water supply and electricity are restored.

Currently, 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture are under evacuation orders of various levels depending on their radiation levels. So far, the orders have not been lifted for any municipality.

The Miyakoji district of Tamura will likely become the first community where the order is lifted. Electricity, gas, and medical services have been almost completely restored, and the central government has completed its decontamination work in the area.

In August, residents were permitted to make long-term stays at their homes in Miyakoji.

Debate among the municipalities emerged over the compensation period for psychological suffering.

One Miyakoji resident was in favor of cutting off the compensation after a year so that people would stop depending on the payments and move forward with their lives.

Norio Kanno, the mayor of Iitate, where all residents continue to lead lives as evacuees, said one year was an appropriate cutoff point because residents would not feel the need to return to work if the compensation was overly extended.

However, Katsunobu Sakurai, the mayor of Minami-Soma, said: "Residents will be puzzled by the across-the-board one-year extension. Decontamination and removal of rubble has still not been completed."

The panel's proposal was based largely on science ministry information about the circumstances surrounding families that left their homes around the nuclear plant.

The information presented at the Oct. 25 meeting showed that, on average, a family of four forced out of no-entry zones had received about 90 million yen in compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co. as of Sept. 20.

It also found that the average compensation amount for property, such as real estate, building and furniture, was 49.1 million yen, while the average compensation for lost wages was 10.9 million yen.

An additional 30 million yen was paid as consolation money for pain and suffering.

The ministry had previously estimated that four-member families would receive 63.03 million yen based on compensation standards set by the evaluation committee and TEPCO.

A ministry official said the difference in amounts arose because families that had reached agreement with TEPCO on compensation tended to be better off because they owned apartment buildings or large plots of land

New rate hike (Chubu)

October 27, 2013

Idled reactors force another utility rate hike

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131027_11.html

All-out idling of the nuclear reactors in the country is not only increasing Japan's trade deficit from oil imports, but also affecting family finances.

Japan's 3rd largest electric utility, Chubu Electric Power Company, says it will seek rate hikes starting in April of next year.

The Nagoya-based utility says it's likely to generate losses for the 3rd straight year in fiscal 2013 due to increasing fuel costs at its thermal power plants.

The firm's Hamaoka nuclear plant on the Pacific coast was idled soon after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear crisis in 2011 due to the possible risk of a future earthquake and tsunami.

The firm will apply for rate increases of around 5 percent for families and 8 to 10 percent for companies from fiscal 2014.

The government will examine the utility's efforts for cost-cutting, including payroll expenses, before approving the rise.

Chubu Electric will be the 7th of 10 regional utilities to raise rates.

Next Japan-Pacific summit in Fukushima

October 28, 2013

Japan-Pacific islands summit to be held in Fukushima in 2015

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131027p2a00m0na008000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Ministers and other officials from Japan and the 16-member Pacific Islands Forum decided Saturday to hold the next summit of their leaders in Iwaki in Japan's northeastern prefecture of Fukushima in May 2015, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said.

The decision was made as participants discussed maritime order, resource management and new ways to cooperate in trade and investment, while taking stock of progress on pledges made at a summit last year.

The next summit, set for May 22 in 2015, is expected to take place at Spa Resort Hawaiians, a leisure complex in Iwaki. Kishida told reporters the summit will provide a good opportunity to demonstrate the region's reconstruction from a massive earthquake and tsunami that flattened Fukushima and other northeastern Japan parts in 2011.

Kishida and Foreign Minister Phillip Muller of the Marshall Islands co-chaired the one-day meeting as a follow-up to the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting held in Okinawa Prefecture in May 2012.

Bearing in mind China's growing maritime presence in the Asia-Pacific region, the participants agreed to pursue the establishment of maritime order where any dispute can be resolved in line with international law.

"The ministers reaffirmed common values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and committed to working together to enhance transparency, predictability and accountability throughout the region," the chairman's summary of the meeting said.

"As like-minded maritime nations, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to working together to ensure maritime security, maritime safety, sustainable fisheries management and maritime order including peaceful settlement of disputes and issues based upon established international law," it said.

Kishida briefed others on a territorial quarrel between Japan and China over a group of Japanese-controlled islands in the East China Sea. He also expressed hope Beijing will respond to Tokyo's call for dialogue.

Kishida also reported to other participants on progress made by Japan in fulfilling its commitment made at last year's summit to make "maximum efforts" to provide up to \$500 million in aid over three years.

On Sunday, participants from the island nations are scheduled to visit Matsushima, a picturesque island near Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture that suffered damage from the massive tsunami in March 2011, to see recovery efforts firsthand.

The Pacific Islands Forum groups Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Japan has hosted the summits six times since 1997.

Simple infographics to explain radiation to children

October 27, 2013

Post-Fukushima radiation education for children applies simple message

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131027p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Students studying infographics at Tokyo City University are applying their skills to teach elementary school pupils about radiation, and are hoping teachers will be able to use the materials to explain the topic in simple terms, even if they lack specialist knowledge.

During a lesson to pupils from Yuno Elementary School in Fukushima on Sept. 3, Daiki Kandatsu, a 20-year-old student in his third year at the university, spoke to the children in front of a poster containing an illustration of a light bulb.

"What if we compare radioactive materials to a light bulb? The light that comes from the bulb is radiation, and the ability to emit light is radioactivity. That's why it's correct for us to say, 'Radiation is emitted,' but not, 'Radioactivity is emitted.'"

To the children, light bulbs and nuclear radiation don't have much in common. But that was a point making the illustration in Kandatsu's talk titled "What is radiation?" easy to understand.

Kandatsu, who studies infographics at university, was not an expert on radiation himself, and he says he created the poster while learning about the issue "from square one." He also wanted to include information on the history of radiation's use, but he paid attention to how much the young children could

take in, and decided to limit his talk to two points: the nature of radioactive materials, and how much radiation we are exposed to in our daily lives.

The light-bulb explanation went down well and Kandatsu heard the students saying, "I think I've got it!"

Education about radiation in Fukushima Prefecture is handled by teachers who received training from the prefectural and municipal education boards, with support from researchers who visit the prefecture from around the nation.

Yukiko Okada, an associate professor in the Atomic Energy Research Laboratory at Tokyo City University, has given over 30 lessons at elementary and junior high schools in Fukushima Prefecture since the 2012 academic year. Through those lessons, she felt the need for teaching materials that could explain radiation in simple terms.

It was around this time that she thought about putting up simple illustrations in school corridors and stairwells to explain radiation. She thought that giving children the chance to look over the information outside classes would deepen their understanding, and she asked Seita Koike, an associate professor specializing in information design at Tokyo City University, to help out.

Koike's research office had been involved in designing Yokohama bus maps, among various projects. Keeping visually impaired users in mind, he made the colors for different bus routes stand out, and increased the space between routes to make the maps more readable.

He stresses that in the latest designs for educational material on radiation, focus was placed on the perspective of users, rather than merely pasting information provided by the government and power companies.

The poster comparing radioactive material to light bulbs is on display in the gym of Yuno Elementary School, along with posters featuring other familiar items, such as curry and rice, and airplanes. The curry and rice poster was designed by a 21-year-old third-year student at the university. Using illustrations of vegetables and meat, it explains that those food products contain radiation in varying levels, saying, "Both food products and our bodies emit radiation." Children said the content was more interesting than what they learned during ordinary lessons.

"One problem with education from experts is the jargon, which is hard for kids to understand -- all those words flying about causes them to drift away from science. But with infographics, there are no such worries," Okada says.

The efforts of Tokyo City University students are due to be unveiled at an Atomic Energy Society meeting at the university next spring.

In 2008, curriculum guidelines for junior high school science education were revised to include lessons about the nature and use of radiation, and education on radiation began in the 2012 academic year. In November 2011, after the outbreak of the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology prepared three types of supplementary teaching materials for use in elementary, junior high and high schools. These materials are used throughout Japan.

At the same time, students in Fukushima Prefecture, where the nuclear disaster broke out, have to continually think about exposure to low-level radiation. To make sure students have correct knowledge about radiation and are equipped to make their own decisions, the prefecture is proceeding with its own education on radiation. The prefectural education board produces material for teachers to use, and study meetings are held for school teachers to boost their knowledge about radiation. This forms the basis for **about two to three hours of teaching each year as part of class activities.**

In December 2012, the Fukushima Municipal Board of Education compiled its own teaching materials, tailored to each school grade, on the grounds that there was a need to provide education corresponding to the situation in the city, where airborne radiation levels were higher than in other municipalities. Second-grade students learn about high radiation levels in ditches and pools of water, while fifth-year elementary school students learn about radioactive materials in food. Second-year junior high school children learn about the effects of radiation on the body.

During training sessions, the Fukushima Municipal Board of Education holds mock lessons to support teachers, but some educators who lack experience worry about teaching children about radiation.

"Sometimes I pretend to know the things I've often read in newspapers or seen on TV," confesses one female elementary school teacher. "I don't know how much is getting through."

Major shift on Fukushima returnees

October 30, 2013

Gov't to abandon idea of having all Fukushima evacuees return home

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131030p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The government is set to provide financial assistance to help nuclear evacuees from the most heavily contaminated areas of Fukushima Prefecture secure housing elsewhere under plans to speed up restoration in the prefecture, it has emerged.

Details of restoration plans being considered by the ruling coalition emerged on Oct. 29. Under the plans, the government will clearly state that areas where annual radiation dosages exceed 50 millisieverts are likely to be uninhabitable for a long time, and will provide financial assistance to help residents from these areas find housing in other places.

The move represents a major shift from the government's original plans to have all residents of Fukushima Prefecture return to their homes.

Areas of Fukushima Prefecture that remain evacuated in the wake of the ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are separated into three different zones depending on the level of radioactive contamination: zones where the yearly dosage tops 50 millisieverts and return is difficult (applying to about 25,000 residents); zones where living restrictions are in place (applying to 23,000 residents); and zones preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders (applying to 33,000 residents).

The ruling coalition has been considering specifying how long it is expected to take before residents can return to these zones. As evacuation orders applying to zones where return is difficult are unlikely to be lifted for a long time, the government intends to clarify how radiation levels are expected to change over the coming years and state the length of time residents are unlikely to be able to return to their homes, thereby helping them make informed decisions. It will also give residents from these zones the opportunity to move to other areas and rebuild their lives through boosted financial assistance.

At the same time, the government will channel funds toward the decontamination of other zones, and help residents to return at an early date, boosting both decontamination work and infrastructure development in areas to which residents can return, and resuming hospital services and laying the groundwork for commercial facilities to operate.

Officials are also considering boosting the amount of compensation that Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crisis-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, provides to evacuated residents. TEPCO currently bases compensation amounts on the value of the homes in which residents were living, but often this is not enough for them to purchase a new home. In addition to stepping up the amount, officials will also indicate when compensation will end and indicate the total amount of compensation, helping residents become independent once again.

Meanwhile, the government will inject some 1 trillion yen to go toward the construction of an interim storage facility for radioactively contaminated waste such as soil. It will consider using taxes slapped onto electricity bills to secure funding, without relying on restoration funds -- a shift from the line of making TEPCO foot the bill, which is likely to stir controversy.

In its plans, the government held off reviewing the system under which the government performs decontamination work on behalf of TEPCO and then bills TEPCO for the cost of the work. However, it left open the option of using some funds from state coffers to fund decontamination, considering the possibility of spending public funds on maintenance of living environments and revitalizing local areas for work beyond the scope of planned decontamination (roughly 1.5 trillion yen).

The government takes the basic position that **TEPCO should handle decommissioning of its crippled nuclear reactors**, and is requesting that the power company prepare a system to handle the work, such as splitting up the company to create a section devoted to decommissioning.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake is discussing the restoration proposal together with the Reconstruction Agency, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and other related government agencies and ministries. The LDP-New Komeito coalition is expected to formally present the proposal to the government sometime around next week

Test fishing expanding targets

October 30, 2013

Test fishing off Fukushima to expand

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131030_35.html

Fishers in Fukushima Prefecture plan to expand their targets for test fishing from 18 types to 27.

The heads of the prefecture's fishing cooperatives met in Iwaki City on Wednesday.

They started test fishing in June last year, 15 months after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant accident. The activity was later interrupted due to radioactive water leakage at the crippled facility.

At the meeting, the heads approved the inclusion next month of 9 types of fish including flathead flounder, which was the leading catch in the area before March 2011.

The additional types have had radiation levels far below the government standard for more than 18 months.

The expected increase in catch would be a boon for the region's fishing industry. The fish are checked for radioactive materials before going on sale at local markets.

Soma City cooperative head Hiroyuki Sato said the flathead flounder season is starting and the fish bring good prices, motivating fishermen. He said he hopes the ban on other types will be lifted soon.

Some areas to remain out of bounds

November 3, 2013

Some Fukushima evacuees can never return home, LDP exec admits

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311030016>

By SACHIKO MIWA/ Staff Writer

SAPPORO--A ruling party executive has called on the government to candidly specify areas contaminated with radioactive materials from the devastated Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant where evacuees who hold out hopes of going home can never return.

“The time will come when someone must say, ‘You cannot live here anymore, but we will make up for it,’ ” Shigeru Ishiba, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party, said in a speech here on Nov. 2.

He effectively called for reversing a government policy of eventually allowing all evacuees to return to their homes.

Ishiba did not mention any candidate areas, but was apparently referring to the most heavily contaminated category among the three types of evacuation zones.

The "difficult-to-return zones," where annual radiation doses exceed 50 millisieverts and evacuees are not allowed to return for at least five years from March 2012, were home to 25,000 people before the Fukushima No. 1 plant was crippled by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Ishiba also called for a review of the government's long-term goal of reducing the annual additional radiation exposure for residents to 1 millisievert or less through decontamination efforts.

"Someday, we have to decide what to do with decontamination standards," he said. "Otherwise, Fukushima will never make headway on reconstruction."

Ishiba's comments appear to be in line with a proposal approved by an LDP committee on post-quake reconstruction on Oct. 31.

The proposal, to be submitted soon to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, calls on the government to **prioritize clean-up operations for areas where evacuees can return in the near future.**

It also says the government must explain to the public that the target of 1 millisievert cannot be achieved in the short term by decontamination efforts alone. The goal is for exposure from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, excluding effects of natural and medical radiation, such as from the environment and X-ray imaging.

The LDP panel also says the government must indicate until when evacuees cannot go back to the difficult-to-return zones and present compensation guidelines so that they can secure housing where they are at present if they give up plans on returning home.

The government is expected to consider necessary measures after receiving the proposal from the LDP panel.

Ishiba's remark (on no-return) causes mixed reactions

November 4, 2013

Debate begins for governments over Ishiba's no-return remark

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201311040066>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Local communities have been stunned by a ruling party executive's suggestion that the government should clearly define areas where evacuees severely impacted by the Fukushima nuclear disaster can never return, as debate begins over the heretofore taboo issue.

Mayors of communities from around the devastated Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have mixed reactions to the remark Shigeru Ishiba, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party, made during a speech in Sapporo on Nov. 2.

"The time will come when someone must say, 'You cannot live here anymore, but we will make up for it,' " Ishiba said, in calling for a reversal of the government's stated goal of eventually having all evacuees return to their homes.

This review of the policy could bring the government under intense fire for deciding to abandon evacuated communities due to high levels of contamination with radioactive materials.

The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is therefore expected to weigh opinions in the affected communities and discussions within the ruling coalition before proceeding.

Ishiba put out his first feelers three days earlier before making his remark.

Tadamori Oshima, chairman of the LDP headquarters for accelerating Fukushima reconstruction, on Oct. 30 submitted a draft proposal to the party's executives ahead of finalizing the proposal.

Ishiba said on that occasion that evacuees should be given explanations, including on the prospects of their eventual return to their homes. "Communication about the risks (to evacuees) is essential," Ishiba told Oshima.

The government's basic stance is to seek the return of all those who wish to return, in the words of a senior Reconstruction Agency official. But many within the government believe that goal is unrealistic.

"Pragmatically speaking, return will remain impossible over the foreseeable future," one government source said, tacitly referring to the areas designated "difficult-to-return zones." The 25,000 or so residents from areas under that designation, where annual radiation doses exceed 50 millisieverts, will not be allowed to return for at least five years from March 2012.

While Ishiba had not gotten consent for his taboo-breaking remark from Abe or Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, it was simply a question of who would be the first to say it in public, an Abe aide said.

But many in the government and ruling parties have hesitated to express it for fear of stirring backlash from disaster survivors.

"It's not for the government to say such-and-such areas are uninhabitable," one Cabinet minister said. The LDP's proposal also maintains, at least on the surface, that the return of all residents to their homes should be sought.

"It's too early to suggest some may not be able to return," said an LDP lawmaker from Fukushima Prefecture.

Abe is expected to soon receive the LDP proposal and prompt government discussions on ways to accelerate rebuilding efforts. The government hopes to use debate within the ruling parties as a catalyst for discussions and then proceed to hear feedback from the affected communities.

"Some will decide they would rather continue to live where they have evacuated than return," one senior government official said. "That sort of decision is better left in the hands of local communities."

The government discussions would have to cover a broad array of subjects, including target areas, time frames and specific assistance measures, making it difficult to tell when there will be a conclusion.

COMMUNITIES SHOW MIXED RESPONSE

Municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture where large landmasses have been designated as difficult-to-return zones could see their very existence endangered.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa, unhappy with Ishiba's remark, insisted on his residents being allowed to return. Designated difficult-to-return zones in Futaba, which co-hosts the stricken nuclear plant, were home to 96 percent of the town's population.

"We have to envisage the return of the next generation, even if we were not able to return," Izawa said. "Even if an area were to be declared uninhabitable, I would want to know how long it will remain so."

Koichi Miyamoto, mayor of Tomioka, said he has "mixed feelings" about Ishiba's remark.

All the town's 16,000 residents have been evacuated elsewhere, including outside Fukushima Prefecture. Thirty percent of them lived in what have since been designated as difficult-to-return zones.

"I have been pinning my faint hopes on the return of the entire town, but that remains up in the air," Miyamoto said. "It is so heart-wrenching, but reality sobers me up."

Redesignations of evacuation zones, completed in August, did nothing to alleviate the suffering of evacuees living in cramped temporary housing and families forced to live apart. Miyamoto said he is often told by angry evacuees, "If we cannot return, just say so."

The biggest concern for Tamotsu Baba, mayor of Namie, is the ability of the government and ruling parties to cope with the situation. Eighty percent of the town's landmass is delineated as difficult-to-return zones.

"A secretary-general suddenly blurts out that some evacuees may not be able to return," Baba said. "I doubt residents will be given proper explanations."

Lite Mayor Norio Kanno said he is opposed to moves that could turn all of the difficult-to-return zones into "never-to-return" zones.

"Some want to return to their homes in difficult-to-return zones, while others have not returned to areas with lower radiation levels," Kanno said. "No simple line can be drawn."

See also :

Some Fukushima evacuees can never return home, LDP exec admits

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311030016>

Exporting Fukushima peaches

November 7, 2013

Shunned at home, Fukushima fruit farmers turn to Southeast Asia for turnaround

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201311070006>

By SHINICHI FUJIWARA/ Staff Writer

DATE, Fukushima Prefecture--Toshiyuki Saito still manages to smile as he carefully packs his products that are banned in some overseas markets and the subject of health scares in Japan.

"It excites me just wondering who will be eating these in a distant country," the 64-year-old said of his light-pink peaches on Oct. 4.

About 200 kilograms of the large peaches he grew at his orchard in Date reached store shelves in Bangkok in mid-October.

Over three decades of serious efforts and promotion, Fukushima Prefecture became a "kingdom" of fruit farming. But all that changed after March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Farmers and officials in the prefecture are now hoping that sales in Southeast Asia will help soften the impact of embargoes in other export markets.

"We also hope Fukushima fruits can win a high reputation in Southeast Asia to offset the negative public image back in Japan," said Yasunobu Wadayama, a deputy sales promotion chief in the prefectural government.

The shipment volume of Fukushima fruit has actually been steady since the Fukushima disaster, but health concerns have slashed their prices in half. The prices of Fukushima peaches have only recovered to about 80 percent of pre-disaster levels.

The Tokyo and Kansai metropolitan areas accounted for the bulk of shipment destinations before the meltdowns at the Fukushima plant.

Annual export volumes have hovered around 50 tons over the last decade or so, and rose to 70 tons in 2009. But Taiwan and Hong Kong, which together imported more than 90 percent of that volume, have banned all imports of Fukushima farm products since the nuclear crisis began.

According to the prefectural government and other sources, exports of peaches, apples and other fruit grown in Fukushima Prefecture began in earnest about 30 years ago in hopes of revitalizing the local economy. The prefectural government covered part of the publicity expenses.

Orchard crop volumes in Fukushima Prefecture in 2011 ranked second among all 47 prefectures of Japan for peaches, fourth for "nashi" pears, fifth for apples and 12th for grapes. These four fruit items had a combined shipment of 72,000 tons in 2011.

Thailand, which is close enough to receive fresh Fukushima peaches, has not shown the radiation fears that are evident in other areas.

In August last year, Fukushima Prefecture and local farming groups invited about 20 Thai retailers to a prefectural institution that screens products for possible radioactive contamination. The retailers were told that only peaches found free of radioactive substances were being shipped.

The Thais were also taken to a peach orchard, where they could sample the fruit.

The first serious exports of Fukushima peaches and apples to Thailand took place the following autumn. Two tons of fruit were sold out at four Bangkok department stores, mostly to wealthy customers who could afford paying about 800 yen (\$8) for a peach and 300 yen for an apple.

“The buyers likely placed trust in Japan’s screening system and made rational decisions,” said Koichi Okamoto, a first secretary for the Japanese Embassy in Thailand who attended the sales event.

Exports of Fukushima fruit to Malaysia also began this year.

A combined 2.5 tons of peaches, along with 250 kg of pears and 80 kg of grapes for trial marketing, were sent to Thailand and Malaysia in August and September. They were all sold out at department stores in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur.

“Despite heavy news coverage in Thailand of radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima nuclear plant, last year’s purchasers returned to praise the taste of our products and buy them in boxes,” said Yusuke Kimura, a sales promotion official for the prefectural government who attended a sales event in Bangkok this autumn.

There are plans to increase exports of Fukushima fruits next year. But the small circulation still means that most of the earnings will go into transportation and other expenses.

Check it yourself

November 9, 2013

Lower radiation readings proposed to speed return of Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311090063>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has drafted a proposal to accelerate the return home of Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees by using radiation readings that tend to be lower than the ones now officially used.

The NRA wants residents to take radiation measurements with dosimeters instead of relying on the current government system of determining levels through aircraft monitoring.

The proposal does not seek a change in the long-term goal of reducing accumulated radiation exposure in affected communities to 1 millisievert a year.

But the government’s air dose rate has often been three to seven times higher than exposure levels checked by individual residents with dosimeters, according to a survey conducted by municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture.

Given the same 1 millisievert target, radiation levels based on dosimeter readings could effectively become a more relaxed target than that based on the air dose rates.

The current dose rates are based on the assumption that people will spend eight hours a day outdoors and 16 hours indoors.

Since September, at the request of the government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, a team consisting of NRA members and outside experts has discussed “scientific and technical aspects” of a basic direction regarding the return home of evacuees.

At a June meeting following decontamination work in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, the central government suggested that residents check radiation exposure levels by themselves with dosimeters.

The NRA urged the government to continue the decontamination work to further reduce radiation levels, saying that giving residents an option to choose the timing of their return home is its responsibility.

But the NRA’s draft proposal, to be announced on Nov. 11, does not refer to impact on evacuees’ health and measures that should be taken. An NRA official also confirmed that it never used the word “safe” in discussions.

The NRA proposal recommends having “communicators” explain to residents about acceptable levels of radiation to eliminate their anxieties.

Under international standards, an annual radiation dose of 1 to 20 millisieverts is acceptable.

Based on those standards, the Japanese government plans to bring annual radiation doses in heavily contaminated areas to within 20 millisieverts to allow residents to return, and eventually to “1 millisievert or less” as a long-term goal.

The government has already spent billions of yen on decontamination work in municipalities affected by the nuclear disaster.

But some evacuees have raised concerns about returning to areas that have not achieved the 1-millisievert goal.

Some members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have requested a review of the 1-millisievert long-term goal. In addition, the government has sought to have the individual dose limit eased with the endorsement of the NRA to encourage residents to return to their homes.

The NRA agreed to change the calculation method of radiation doses from an estimate based on aircraft monitoring to individual measurements with dosimeters.

(This article was written by Yuri Oiwa and Ryuta Koike.)

Food products from Fukushima

Food makers market drinks using Fukushima produce

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131111_10.html

Japan's leading food makers are starting to market beverages and alcoholic drinks using farm products from Fukushima Prefecture.

The move is to help farmers in the prefecture who grow crops in safe areas but have been affected by concerns over food safety following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in 2011.

Kagome will start selling tomato juice made from fruit harvested in Fukushima at the end of this month. The company stopped using tomatoes from Fukushima soon after the nuclear accident.

But it says it has confirmed safety of the crop after checks over 2 years and decided to use the produce again. It introduced equipment to monitor radioactivity levels in food.

The food maker says it has responded to calls from consumers who want to support rebuilding efforts in Fukushima. The label of the product clearly shows "made in Fukushima."

Kirin Brewery is also marketing a new alcoholic drink which contains the juice of pears harvested in Fukushima.

The package also identifies the product as having been "made in Fukushima".

A Kirin official says his company wants to help the local economy by letting consumers know that pears from Fukushima are tasty.

The sales of the drink will be limited until the end of the year. The company says it will continue sales if the drink proves popular.

Going home: Not always possible

November 11, 2013

For many Fukushima evacuees, the truth is they won't be going home

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311110077>

REUTERS

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--For many of oldest nuclear refugees, all they want is to be allowed back to the homes they were forced to abandon. Others are ready to move away, severing ties to the ghost towns that remain in the shadow of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant.

But among the thousands of evacuees stuck in temporary housing more than two and a half years after the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl, there is a shared understanding on one point--the government is unable to deliver on its ambitious initial goals for cleaning up the areas that had to be evacuated after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

"You can't have a temporary life forever," said Ichiro Kazawa, 61, whose home was destroyed by the tsunami that also knocked out power to the Fukushima plant.

Kazawa escaped four minutes before the first wave. Next year, he hopes to return to a home within sight of the Fukushima plant and take his 88-year-old mother back.

But he wants the government to admit what many evacuees have already accepted--for many there will be no going home as planned.

"I think it will be easier for people who can't go back anyway to be told that so they can plan their future," said Kazawa, who remains unemployed.

Lawmakers from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's coalition parties on Nov. 11 recommended the government step back from the most ambitious Fukushima clean-up goals, and begin telling evacuees that a \$30 billion clean-up will not achieve the long-term radiation reduction goal set by the previous administration.

"The government and ruling party will act as one and deal with this firmly," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, adding that Abe would consider the proposal seriously.

The government is also considering a proposal floated earlier this month to offer new compensation to residents in the areas of highest radiation who have no prospect of returning home, officials involved have said.

"There will come a time when someone has to say, 'You won't be able to live here anymore, but we will make up for it'," the secretary general of the LDP, Shigeru Ishiba, said in a speech earlier this month.

FRUSTRATION, RESIGNATION

Around a third of the 160,000 people forced to flee when the earthquake and tsunami triggered a triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant remain in flimsy temporary housing units that are nearing the 3-year limit initially promised.

Social workers report an increase in domestic strife, alcoholism and illnesses such as deep vein thrombosis from lack of exercise.

In August, the number of people in Fukushima who have died since the accident from illnesses related to prolonged evacuation rose to 1,539, nearing the prefecture's tsunami death toll of 1,599.

Among those who remain, there is frustration, resignation and a sense that the hardest decisions remain ahead.

"Politicians preferred to make people believe in something and put off making really difficult decisions until as late as possible," said Hideo Hasegawa, who runs a non-profit group in Fukushima helping evacuees.

The evacuation area--a little bigger than Hong Kong--was carved into three zones in late 2011 based on radiation readings.

The most contaminated area was predicted to remain uninhabited for at least five years and remains off limits.

The Ministry of Environment has contracted work to clean up the 11 most heavily contaminated townships, with the aim of bringing the average annual radiation dose to 20 millisieverts per year based on a range suggested by the International Centre for Radiological Protection.

Current policy dictates that evacuation orders be lifted and compensation payments stopped when that level is reached.

However, the government also set a lower, long-term target of 1 millisievert--twice the background radiation in Denver.

Some had hoped the decontamination project employing thousands of temporary workers to strip trees, spray roads and remove topsoil would be enough to hit that ambitious target.

Officials had cautioned from the start against those hopes, since 90 percent of the projected reduction in radiation comes from natural decay of radioactive particles over time.

DELAYS, DUMPING

Meanwhile, decontamination work has been marred by delays and reports that workers have sometimes simply dumped waste rather than collect it for later storage.

The environment ministry has pushed back the deadline for completion for seven of 11 townships and has yet to announce new target dates.

Some evacuees remain concerned that 20 millisieverts per year poses health risks, especially for children. That dose over five years is the limit for nuclear workers. Many have stuck with the target of 1 millisievert as a yardstick for safety.

"No matter how hard they try to decontaminate, radiation isn't going down. So even though we have decided to go back, we can't," said Keiko Shioi, a 59-year-old housewife from Naraha, near the nuclear plant.

Radiation near her house is running at two to three times the long-term target, she said.

Just 12 percent of evacuees from Tomioka, one of the most heavily contaminated villages, say they want to return home, according to a survey published in September.

"No matter how much they decontaminate I'm not going back because I have children and it is my responsibility to protect them," said Yumi Ide, a mother of two teenage boys from Tomioka.

Evacuees are equally worried about a lack of jobs, schools, medical care or even groceries in towns that have been abandoned since 2011.

"It doesn't make any sense to return people to towns with no infrastructure," said Norio Horiuchi, 71, a retired engineer from Tomioka.

REUTERS

Hard decisions for evacuees

November 12, 2013

Fukushima recovery plan urges evacuees to make hard decision

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131112p2a00m0na009000c.html>

As the government seeks to speed up disaster recovery in areas near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, evacuees have to decide whether to abandon their homes and start new lives or wait until they can return.

Disaster-recovery task forces from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner, New Komeito, presented a Fukushima recovery plan on Nov. 11, in which they clearly stated that areas where annual radiation dosages exceed 50 millisieverts are likely to be uninhabitable for a long time.

Mitsuyoshi Kawahara, 71, who has evacuated from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, to a temporary housing unit in Fukushima city, said he had accepted the reality since the nuclear plant accident in March 2011 that he would be unable to ever return to his home. Of 32 households from Futaba that initially lived in the temporary housing complex, eight had moved out. Another two will leave by the spring of next year.

Kawahara returned home briefly at the beginning of this month, but radiation levels around his house measured 14-20 microsieverts per hour, about 100 times higher than permissible levels.

"If I was allowed to return home for good today, I could fix the house. But, that's not happening," Kawahara said.

The recovery plan does not refer to decontamination work in the Futaba district nor a support system for those who voluntarily evacuate from the town.

"It's better to be told that I can't return for a while than being told that I can go home someday and having to wait for years," said 66-year-old Namie town resident Yasuhiko Sasaki. "But I can't accept not being able to return home forever. I want the government to conduct decontamination work in my hometown so that we can occasionally visit our homes," he added.

A 39-year-old housewife who has voluntarily evacuated from the city of Koriyama to Aizuwakamatsu in Fukushima Prefecture hopes for fair support from the government. "Voluntary evacuees are often criticized by people who think we're evacuating just to get compensation," she commented. She pointed out that these labels such as "difficult-to-return" and "voluntary evacuees" are dividing the community.

Fukushima evacuees express anger, resignation at government policy shift

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311120071>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A framed photograph in Etsuko Oura's temporary housing shows an aerial view of the house that her husband and son had built 100 kilometers away in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture.

That 430-square-meter home, surrounded by yuzu citrus and pomegranate trees, is gone, swept away by the tsunami in 2011. Her husband, Ryuichi, died at age 76 in late 2011 as he was designing a new hillside home close to the original house in Okuma, co-host of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

And on Nov. 11, Oura lost something else: her hopes of living in her hometown again.

"I know I will not be able to return to Okuma," said the 70-year-old evacuee, who lives alone in Aizu-Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. "As long as I am away from home, I cannot feel true happiness under any circumstance. I will be tied to these feelings forever."

More than two-and-a-half years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima nuclear plant, the government effectively reversed its stated goal of eventually allowing all Fukushima evacuees to return to their homes.

Many of them had earlier abandoned plans of returning. But others continued to believe that they would eventually move back after the government cleaned up the affected areas.

Now, they and their local leaders are expressing anger at the government for raising hopes for so long.

"Politicians a long time ago should have specified the areas where evacuees will not be able to return and presented plans to help them rebuild their lives elsewhere," said Toshitaka Kakinuma, a 71-year-old real-estate agent who has evacuated from Okuma to Iwaki, also in Fukushima Prefecture.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Nov. 11 the government will overhaul measures to deal with the Fukushima nuclear disaster based on a package of proposals from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and junior coalition partner New Komeito.

The coalition proposal was the first to call for government support to evacuees who give up plans to return to "difficult-to-return zones," the communities most heavily contaminated with radioactive fallout.

"The government must present a concrete blueprint for reconstruction and help people rebuild their lives," Abe said.

In Okuma, 96 percent of residents used to live in areas designated as difficult-to-return zones, where evacuees are not allowed to return for at least six years from the March 2011 disaster.

The ruling coalition's proposal called on the government to clearly explain how long the evacuees will be unable to return to these difficult-to-return zones, where annual radiation doses exceed 50 millisieverts.

Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe said he is worried that some communities in these zones will disappear as the government abandons its goal of allowing all evacuees to return home.

"What we thought would come sooner or later has come," he said of the proposal.

About 10 percent of the town's residents still want to return to Okuma, according to the town.

"We want to establish an environment that will allow residents to return in 10 to 20 years," Watanabe said. "We will not change that plan."

Harutoshi Funabashi, a professor of environmental sociology at Hosei University, said the government should offer more choices for the evacuees.

"The proposal gave only two options--to return or not to return. A third way, which would allow evacuees to return decades later, will be necessary," Funabashi said.

Kakinuma, the real-estate agent, said he gave up returning to Okuma several months after the nuclear accident. He said the government should have shifted its policy much earlier.

"I told the mayor and town officials that the land with high levels of radiation must be bought up by the government," Kakinuma said. "But they only said they would clean up the land so that residents would be able to return. We never talked about the same thing."

Kakinuma and his wife moved from Yokohama to their Okuma home, 2.6 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, 10 years ago. He said they relocated because they liked the location close to the sea and the mild climate.

Next year, they will move to Fukuoka Prefecture, where his son's family lives.

Hisashi Kato, 54, and his wife, Yoko, 49, who have evacuated to Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, moved from temporary housing to a newly built house in September.

The couple found their original home in Tomioka, south of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, full of rat droppings every time they visited to clean the premises.

The barricades around difficult-to-return zones were indications that they would not be able to live there anymore.

They brought a large number of photo albums retrieved from Okuma into their new home.

“All we need to do is to move forward with our heads up,” Yoko said.

But Hisashi’s mother, Toshiko, used to say she wanted to return to Tomioka even after her body became weak during the prolonged evacuation.

“Elderly people held out hopes because the government said evacuees could return once communities were decontaminated,” Hisashi said.

Toshiko died at age 83 last autumn.

“My mother might have been able to live a forward-looking life if she had been told candidly that it was unknown whether she could return,” Hisashi said.

The government spent billions of yen to decontaminate the affected areas to speed up the return of the evacuees. But the work was found to be sloppy and largely ineffective. Radiation levels in those areas have not decreased significantly.

The Abe administration is considering the proposals of the LDP and New Komeito for the government to earmark taxpayers money for decontamination activities, beyond those already planned, and to build intermediate storage facilities for radioactive soil and debris.

Under the current framework, Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, is required to shoulder the costs for decontamination, but the utility has largely refused to do so.

The coalition partners also proposed that radiation levels measured by dosimeters, instead of those based on air dose rates, be used as the standard for monitoring the effects of radiation exposure on health of residents who return.

Dosimeter readings tend to be lower than those derived from airborne monitoring and other methods. The shift would effectively relax the long-term goal of reducing radiation exposure to 1 millisievert a year while cutting the scope of and costs for the clean-up work.

The two parties also called on the government to provide more funding to help TEPCO proceed with decommissioning and deal with the problem of radioactive water leaks.

The government in September decided to spend 47 billion yen (\$475 million) in taxpayers money to build frozen soil walls to prevent contamination of groundwater and on other measures to contain the radioactive water.

Problems remain, however.

Shinji Tokonami, a professor at Hirosaki University and expert in dose measurements, said the plan to reduce radiation exposure based on individual dose readings is an ideal approach.

But he said it will be difficult to decide which reading should be applied for a large group involved because measurements often differ from one person to another.

“We support the idea of focusing on individual dose readings,” an Environment Ministry official said. “But it will be a difficult problem how to put it into practice.”

Although the government plans to play a greater role in decontamination, decommissioning and containing radioactive water, it will face public criticism that it is bailing out TEPCO if expenditures snowball.

The final tab for decommissioning the Fukushima reactors is unknown because it is expected to take 40 years to complete.

Also unknown are the plans of some evacuees, like Oura in Aizu-Wakamatsu. She still is unable to place her husband's ashes in a family tomb in her hometown.

The family of her 42-year-old son used to live in nearby temporary housing but moved to Iwaki in April. He asked her to come along, but Oura decided to remain because her friends from Okuma live within the same complex.

"It will not be worthwhile to be all alone in a strange land," she said.

"It must be easy for people in high offices to say 'You cannot return,' but I have to say sorry to our ancestors for losing the land that has been our family's for generations," she said.

(This article was compiled from reports by Tetsuya Kasai, Takuro Negishi, Kunio Ozawa and other staff writers.)

People cannot be left "sitting on the fence" forever

November 12, 2013

Editorial: Gov't must not leave Fukushima residents sitting on fence

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131112p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Up until now, the government has set a goal of having all residents evacuated in the wake of the devastating disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant return home. But a Fukushima recovery plan presented to the government by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner New Komeito on Nov. 11 altered that stance, calling for people from zones that are likely to remain uninhabitable for a long time to have the option of relocating elsewhere.

People set on returning to their hometowns may have difficulty accepting the new plan. But residents cannot be left sitting on the fence any longer. In fact, the relocation option should have been presented much earlier.

We now call on the government to take every measure to support residents as they build new lives, whether they decide to return or move to other areas.

To help residents choose the right path, the government needs to provide them with a proper estimation of how radiation levels are likely to change over the next five or 10 years, and the predicted radiation doses over this period. If there remain some areas to which residents have no hope of returning, then the government should clearly tell them that.

Those who decide to relocate elsewhere need various forms of support, including a place to live, employment, medical treatment, and education. Efforts need to be made to ensure that people can move elsewhere at the same time so that they remain stitched together in their original communities.

Support to enable people to return to areas to which the government deems return possible is one important part of the Fukushima recovery plan. The government needs to establish a system that will make it possible for residents who want to return to do so with peace of mind. In addition to decontamination, restoration of infrastructure, secure employment and other such things are needed to help residents plan their lives.

For individuals to properly manage their health, it is important for them to know their radiation doses and for the government to ensure that they can live their lives without excessive exposure to radiation. Dispatching health workers and other specialists who are knowledgeable about radiation and whom residents can consult with is the kind of support that would help residents feel at ease.

That said, even if the government decides that people can return to their hometowns, there will no doubt be some who are hesitant to do so due to concerns about radiation. In particular, it would be only natural for young women and people with children to be reluctant to return. The government must respect each person's decision. Residents must not be forced to return home, or be cut off from support either.

One government standard for the lifting of evacuation orders is a yearly air dose of radiation not exceeding 20 millisieverts. However, some say that this level is too high. The government should reconsider the standard while keeping in mind the actual doses of radiation that individuals are expected to receive.

The government states that its long-term target for the yearly radiation dosage is 1 millisievert. It should present its outlook for achieving this target based on the actual situation. Many people see this as a guideline for returning home, but in some cases, even if an area is decontaminated, radiation levels cannot be brought down to this level in a short period. In fact, the process can take decades.

Just how effective is decontamination, and how much will it cost? Now is the time to balance out decontamination work after disclosing the effectiveness and limits of the work, and use the limited available human resources and funding to help people get their lives back on track.

Some say the figure of 1 millisievert, which is difficult to achieve at present, has taken on a life of its own, but this is because the government has failed to provide a sufficient explanation, not because residents have made unwarranted assumptions.

Safety of marine products

November 13, 2012

Agency: Japanese marine products are safe

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131114_02.html

A senior Japanese fisheries official has told foreign reporters Japanese sea products are safe. The Fisheries Agency is trying to dispel concerns about radioactive leaks from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Masanori Miyahara said some radioactive substances were detected in seawater within the Daiichi port in tests from March 2011 - September this year. But he said the level outside the port is mostly below detectable limits.

A reporter questioned Miyahara on the reliability of the data. Another asked how Japan will persuade South Korea to lift a ban on imports of Japanese sea products.

The ban affects Fukushima and 7 neighboring prefectures.

Miyahara said Japan will continue to provide information based on science. He said changing the view of South Korea is important. He said Fisheries Agency officials will hold events to explain the safety of the products.

The agency says it will provide information in 6 languages, including English and Korean, on its website.

People worried about radiation in food

November 15, 2013

1 in 5 people in Japan avoid produce from radiation-exposed areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131115p2g00m0dm027000c.html>

TSUKUBA, Japan (Kyodo) -- About 20 percent of adults avoid buying farm produce grown in places they think likely to be contaminated with radiation, a nationwide survey by the National Institute for Environmental Studies has found.

The survey with replies from 1,121 people aged 20-79 was conducted in February, about two years after the multiple nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant following the March 11, 2011 quake and tsunami.

"While (produce) is strictly inspected in the shipping and distribution phases, there is much misunderstanding," said Midori Aoyagi, head of the environmental planning section at the institute in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture.

Asked if they avoid localities with the likelihood of radioactive contamination when buying farm produce, 20.7 percent said they "always" do so and 15.4 percent said they "often" so do, while those who said they "do not do so at all" came to 34.9 percent.

Asked to what extent the spread of radioactive materials through the accident will affect the health of children and grandchildren, 49.9 percent said it will have a "big impact" and 39.5 percent said there will be "somewhat of an impact," together accounting for nearly 90 percent of the total.

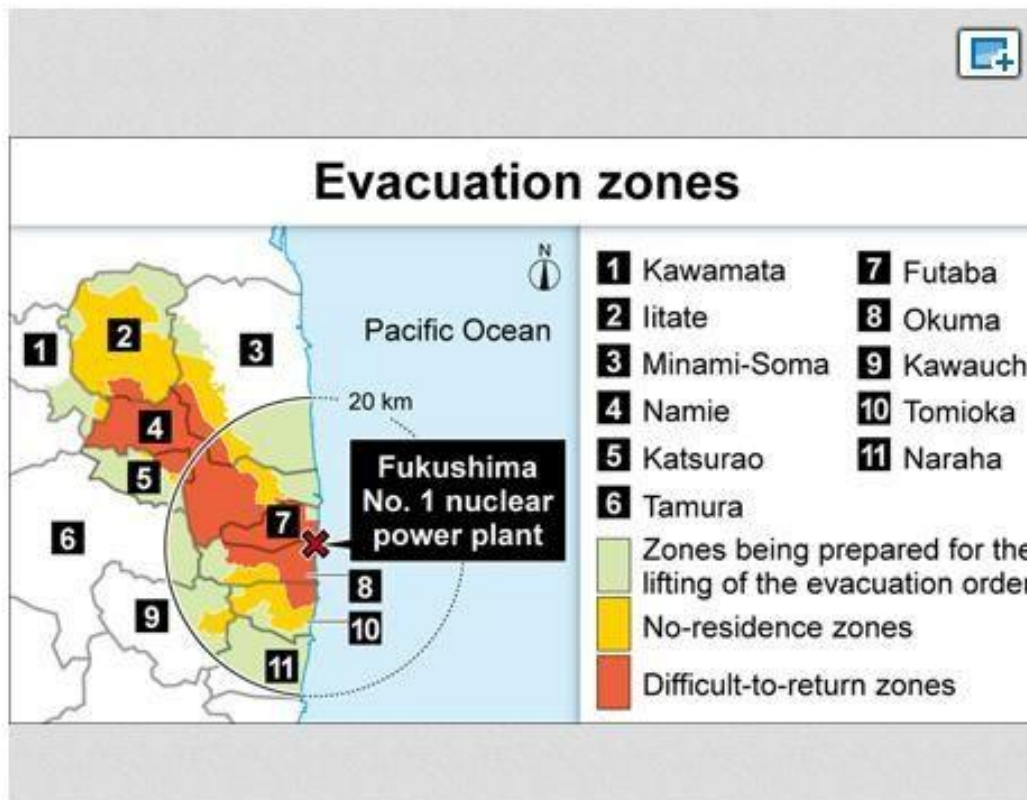
The institute commissioned the survey to a Tokyo-based private research company, Survey Research Center Co.

Evacuees must be included in of discussions on their own future

November 15, 2013

EDITORIAL: Opinions of Fukushima evacuees essential in support measures

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201311150065>



Amid the prolonged evacuation from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the government effectively dropped its policy of aiming to have all evacuees return to their homes.

It will also re-examine safety standards of radiation doses used for decontamination work and health-care measures.

The evacuees still have a common wish--the situation will return to the way it was before the nuclear accident. But over the last two years and eight months, they have realized that this wish will not come true.

Naturally, many have decided to make a fresh start in other places.

HOW TO MAINTAIN FAIRNESS

We have no objection to the government broadening the options for support. But in deciding its policies, the government must ensure that it does not create new rifts among residents.

Regardless of whether the evacuees decide to return home or not, the only thing the government can do is to carefully deal with each case based on the idea of helping individuals rebuild their lives.

In Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, where all 20,000 residents were required to evacuate, communities were split into three categories.

The most heavily contaminated areas are designated as “difficult-to-return zones,” and there are currently no prospects for residents to return there. “No-residence zones” are places where several more years are needed to reduce radiation levels.

The remaining areas, where residents are expected to be able to return in a relatively short period, are designated as “zones being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order.”

The difficult-to-return zones account for 80 percent of the town’s area. In number, it equals about half that of the populations in each of the other two zones.

“In the towns of Okuma and Futaba, where 90 percent of the population comes from difficult-to-return zones, and Naraha, which has no such zones, it is easier for the municipal governments to come up with requests and reconstruction plans,” a Namie town official said. “But in Namie, the gaps in the circumstances among affected residents are too wide.”

One such gap exists in financial support for evacuees to acquire new homes for relocation.

The ruling parties came up with a proposal to provide additional support directed at residents of difficult-to-return zones.

But outside the designated areas, many homes remain difficult to return to due to leaking roofs and rat infestations. If the provision of support is narrowed, these households would be left out.

Funding remains a concern. Homes washed away by the March 11, 2011, tsunami would be outside the scope of compensation if the funding is provided through additional compensation measures by Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled nuclear power plant.

That could lead to a wider gap between those who lost their homes and those whose homes remain standing.

The circumstances of each community must be taken into account to maintain fairness.

It would be meaningless for “the central government to come to the fore” if it imposes too many restrictions on how and when to spend the money provided to local governments of stricken areas. Measures, such as setting up funds and granting lump-sum subsidies, are needed to make it easier for those local governments to exercise discretion in spending their budgets to meet the actual circumstances.

HEALTH-CARE SUPPORT AS A SET

It is also important to prevent changes in safety standards of radiation exposure from leading to the abandonment of stricken areas.

A panel of the Nuclear Regulation Authority put together a set of proposals comprising three major points: Standards for decontamination can be relaxed, maintaining the long-term goal of reducing additional radiation exposure in affected areas to 1 millisievert a year; evacuees should be allowed to return home if annual radiation doses are below 20 millisieverts; and levels should be calculated based on readings on individual dosimeters instead of air dose measurements.

Radiation levels of decontaminated areas have declined since the time immediately after the accident. However, it has been difficult to lower annual radiation doses to 1 millisievert or less in many areas.

Although Date, Fukushima Prefecture, is located outside the evacuation zone, it was one of the first municipalities to tackle decontamination work.

Takahiro Hanzawa, the city official in charge of decontamination, said, “We should stop decontamination work when we can not expect the radiation levels to decline any more. It leads to the destruction of nature and could exhaust funding for other necessary policies.”

If the government sticks to the 1-millisievert goal, resulting in a delay in rebuilding livelihoods, re-examining the standards with the consent of residents could be an option.

However, decontamination work has yet to start in heavily polluted areas.

Concerns have been raised that eased standards could lead to reduced measures in dealing with radiation exposure and helping evacuees return to their homes.

Regarding the shift in measuring radiation doses, it will be difficult to gather the necessary data unless a system is established for individual residents to keep measuring and recording readings on their dosimeters.

The shift in policy should be presented as a set with long-term health-care support measures, including the assignment of public health nurses and counselors and deciding how to respond when radiation doses surpass permissible levels.

PARTICIPATION OF RESIDENTS

When we consider the serious damage caused by the nuclear disaster, **it is difficult to provide a solution that can satisfy everyone.**

Under such circumstances, **it is important to include residents in discussions so that they may find it easier to accept the agreed-upon measures for their futures.**

The small gatherings of residents that allow participants to freely exchange views should continue. Such steady efforts are common in cases in which reconstruction plans and decontamination work have made smooth progress.

Encouraging local communities to develop the power of autonomy will help them overcome difficult times when no solution can satisfy all.

Safety of Fukushima rice

November 17, 2013

Fukushima rice farmers try to ease consumer fears with thorough scanning



Workers scan bags of rice for radiation before shipping to market, at a scanning site in Motomiya, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)



A sticker attached to a bag of rice declares it has been scanned for radiation and found within national safety standards. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131117p2a00m0na007000c.html>

With some consumers continuing to feel uneasy about buying Fukushima Prefecture products out of fear of radiation, the prefecture's rice farmers are hoping to reassure them through radiation scanning of all bags of rice before shipping.

At a scanning center in the city of Motomiya, Fukushima Prefecture, 30-kilogram bags of rice from farms are piled high, waiting to be placed on conveyor belts and carried into scanning machines that check their levels of radioactive cesium. Each of the devices can check four bags of rice a minute. If the scanning result is under the national safety limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram, a screen announces the bag's safety and the bag receives a seal confirming that it has been scanned. If the bag exceeds the safety limit, the scanning machine stops the process to notify workers.

Last year, some 270,000 bags of rice were scanned for radiation in the city. Hiroaki Tsujimoto, an official of the city's agricultural policy department, touts the rice's safety, saying, "99.9 percent of the rice scanned (last year) was at or below 25 becquerels (per kilogram)."

There are a total of 173 such scanning facilities in Fukushima Prefecture, and all Fukushima rice is sent for scanning by these machines before transportation to the market. Last year, 10 million 30-kilogram bags of rice were scanned across the prefecture, and 99.8 percent were at 25 becquerels or less of radioactive cesium per kilogram.

Only 71 bags, or 0.0007 percent, exceeded the safety limit. The highest amount of radioactive cesium detected was 360 becquerels per kilogram, but this is still lower than the European Union's safety limit of 1,250 becquerels per kilogram.

Meanwhile, local research has contributed to radiation-lowering techniques for rice crops. The Fukushima Agricultural Technology Centre was among groups whose research showed that, when given large amounts of potassium fertilizer, rice plants will take up less cesium, which has similar chemical properties with potassium. The research also found that adding zeolite to soil would absorb cesium, reducing the amount that rice plants take up. Another finding was that cesium levels fall when rice plant straw from harvested plants is left in rice field paddies. Using such data, rice growers have made determined efforts to clean the radiation from their fields.

One local farmer, Takeichi Suzuki, 58, who lives in Motomiya's neighboring village of Otama, has been growing rice for 40 years. He takes into consideration the environmental cost, using farming methods that employ fewer chemical fertilizers and pesticides. His rice has won first place in a village taste competition.

"I've used potassium fertilizer and zeolite in efforts to reduce the radiation. I'm confident in the taste and safety (of my rice,)" he says.

The nuclear disaster, however, has had an effect on the prices of Fukushima rice. Pre-nuclear disaster, the average price of "koshihikari" rice harvested in Fukushima's central region was higher than the national average, but after the 2011 disaster the price fell to 91 to 95 percent of the national average. Last year it was up to 96 to 98 percent of the national average. Fukushima Prefecture's rice harvest, at around 450,000 tons, was the fourth largest in the nation pre-disaster, but last year its harvest was down to 370,000 tons, making it the seventh largest producer.

This August, the Consumer Affairs Agency conducted a survey on around 5,100 consumers across the nation on their attitudes toward Fukushima products. The results were that 17.9 percent said they "hesitate to buy products made in Fukushima Prefecture." Though a slight drop from the 19.4 percent who gave the same answer in last year's survey, it showed that around 20 percent of people continue to hesitate to buy Fukushima products.

The Consumer Affairs Agency believes that consumers hesitate to buy Fukushima brands because "correct information is not getting through to them." Similarly, an official of the Fukushima Prefectural Government's agricultural product distribution department said, "It hasn't gotten through to the whole country that producers are working together, scanning all rice bags and only shipping rice that is under the safety limit."

Evacuees housing units falling apart

November 17, 2013

Fukushima evacuees' housing units crumbling

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/17/national/fukushima-evacuees-housing-units-crumbling/#.UokiySewT9k>

Fukushima Minpo

At the temporary housing complexes in Fukushima Prefecture that serve as homes for those displaced by the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing nuclear disaster, degradation of the buildings is becoming a serious issue.

Most of the units are well over 2 years old, and some are suffering from damaged floors and walls that are falling apart.

Requests for repairs now exceed 300 cases a month. As winter approaches, some also fear that gaps in the walls created by the now tilting structures could let cold wind and snow into their homes. To deal with the situation, the prefectural government said it will start checking all 17,000 units this year.

“I can’t sleep well because the floor squeaks when I turn over in my futon,” said Toshiko Oshima, 68, rubbing her sleepy eyes. Originally from Namie, Oshima lives in one of the temporary housing units in Minamiyanome in the city of Fukushima.

The complex was built in June 2011, three months after the disasters. And after more than two years and five months, the damage is obvious. What bothers Oshima the most is the floor, which squeaks with every step she takes and seems to be getting bigger day by day.

Meanwhile, the ceiling above the door has turned black with mold. To prevent it from increasing, wiping the ceiling has become a daily task for Oshima.

Jusei Saito, 69, an evacuee from the radiation-tainted town of Okuma who lives in a temporary housing complex in Ikkimachi Nagahara in Aizuwakamatsu, feels the entire house is tilting. Saito suspects this is happening because the foundation of the building is made of wood rather than concrete.

Because of the tilt, a gap has formed in the window by the toilet, and between the door and the wall separating the kitchen from the living room areas.

“It’s going to get really cold from now on, but I wonder if we’re OK,” he asked with a grim look on his face.

Fukushima Prefecture has built temporary housing units in 25 municipalities, all fully financed by the central government. The disaster relief law stipulates that evacuees are entitled to use the units for two years, but the related ordinance was revised in June 2011 to give the prefecture the authority to extend that time limit each year if necessary.

In April this year, the Fukushima Prefectural Government decided that the residents in temporary housing could continue using the units until the end of March 2015. There are about 29,500 residents in temporary housing.

More than 90 percent of such units are over 2 years old. According to the Recycling Society Promotion Center, a nonprofit organization commissioned to mend the units, more than 300 repair requests are filed each month.

More and more residents are asking to have the units' exteriors fixed. In November of 2011, soon after the NPO was commissioned to handle the repairs, the group had only received four requests. But the tally hit 63 in September this year.

Many of the repairs are to fix broken wooden steps leading to the doors of the units or decks outside the windows; both are vulnerable to rain. Residents claim they could get hurt by the deterioration.

In some cases, people's windows or doors no longer close properly because of the growing tilt in the structures. In wooden units, walls facing south receive more sunlight and tend to fall off. At a housing compound in the town of Shinchi in March, the roofs were blown away by strong wind. Many residents are thus worried about the units' durability.

Masatoshi Usami, 79, an evacuee from the radiation-contaminated town of Tomioka living in a temporary housing in Wakamiyamae of Koriyama, is eager to move to public housing set aside for disaster victims, but a concrete plan to do so hasn't emerged yet.

Usami became worried about the strength of his temporary home when a quake ranked 4 on the seven-level Japanese seismic intensity scale rattled much of the region on Oct. 26.

"I don't know when I can move out of this temporary housing. I really want the government to deal with the situation so that we can lead our lives calmly," he said.

During the housing checks scheduled to start by the end of the year, staff from the companies that built them will not only examine their exteriors but their foundations as well. Since wood was used in the foundations of most of the units, the builders will check for erosion and subsidence.

The checks are supposed to be finished by the end of March, with all repairs and reinforcement work to be conducted immediately after being spotted.

"We will investigate thoroughly to cast aside the worries of the residents," said an official from Fukushima's housing construction division. The prefecture plans to conduct the checks annually.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published Nov. 1.

500 billion yen for TEPCO

November 15, 2013

Creditor banks to loan 500 billion yen to TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311150052>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s main creditor banks agreed to provide 500 billion yen (\$5 billion) in loans after the utility forecast a fiscal 2014 profit based on assumptions it can restart two nuclear reactors.

The creditors will extend 300 billion yen in new loans to the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in addition to 200 billion yen in refinancing at the end of this year, sources in both TEPCO and the banks told The Asahi Shimbun.

The group includes Japan's three mega-bank groups--Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Mizuho Financial Group and Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group--and the Development Bank of Japan.

TEPCO, which posted losses in fiscal 2011 and 2012, is expected to return to the black in fiscal 2013, thanks partly to cost reductions and an increase in electricity rates.

In talks with creditors, the utility forecast a profit in fiscal 2014 assuming that the No. 6 and No. 7 reactors of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture will be brought back online. Nuclear power generation will significantly reduce the need to spend huge amounts on fuel to run thermal power plants, TEPCO has said.

TEPCO expects the reactor operations to resume in April, July or October next year. The company also showed how another hike in electricity rates would improve its bottom line, the sources said.

But the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactors, which have remained offline since the Fukushima nuclear crisis started in March 2011, can only be reactivated after they have passed safety screenings by the Nuclear Regulation Authority. Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida, who has maintained a cautious stance, must also give his consent.

The NRA is soon expected to begin full safety screenings for the No. 6 and No. 7 reactors.

Despite the uncertainties, the creditor banks appear optimistic about TEPCO's chances of staying in the black.

The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is discussing plans to alleviate TEPCO's financial burden by having the government bear part of the huge expenses to decontaminate affected areas and build intermediate storage facilities around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

TEPCO and the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund plan to review the utility's rehabilitation program, including the introduction of a holding company structure, by the end of December.

The facilitation fund on Nov. 14 interviewed officials of TEPCO's main creditor banks for requests about the rehabilitation plan. The banks are expected to finalize their decision on extending the loans once the rehabilitation program has been reviewed.

Fukushima mayor ousted from office

November 18, 2013

Frustrated voters dump incumbent mayor in Fukushima election

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311180075>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Fukushima Mayor Takanori Seto became the latest incumbent ousted from office in the prefecture, where residents and evacuees have expressed increased frustration over delays in rebuilding from the nuclear disaster.

Independent newcomer Kaoru Kobayashi, 54, easily won the Fukushima mayoral election on Nov. 17, dashing the hopes of Seto, 66, who was seeking his fourth term.

The incumbent mayors of Koriyama, Iwaki and the town of Tomioka in Fukushima Prefecture also lost in their re-election bids this year.

Kobayashi, a former Environment Ministry official, received 72,441 votes, more than double the 32,851 for Seto. Another first-time candidate, Yutaka Yamada, 58, president of the Fukushima-Soma district of the Japanese Communist Party, received 7,620 votes.

The voter turnout rate rose to 49.1 percent from the previous 38.2 percent in 2009.

One of the main issues of the election was the prefectural capital's policy concerning decontamination work and reconstruction plans related to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Kobayashi emphasized he would renovate municipal politics, including an acceleration of decontamination work and an early installation of temporary storage facilities for contaminated soil and debris.

Seto, who was backed by the municipal chapters of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, New Komeito and the Social Democratic Party, stressed his achievements as mayor for over 10 years.

Fukushima voters showed they were not impressed with Seto's latest efforts.

Eriko Nakagawa, a 44-year-old homemaker, voted for Kobayashi after noticing delays in the decontamination work in the city.

"I could not see what the mayor was doing at all," said Nakagawa, who voted for Seto in the last mayoral election.

A 41-year-old woman who has been living as an evacuee in Yamagata voted for Kobayashi by absentee ballot on Nov. 13, saying she cannot support the incumbent.

An estimated 6,000 people who voluntarily evacuated from the city still live away from their homes.

About 115,000 houses in Fukushima city are subject to decontamination work to clear radioactive substances from the nuclear disaster that was triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Work has been completed on only 18 percent of them.

Decontamination work has not even started on some school routes.

According to the Nuclear Regulation Authority, the air dose radiation in Fukushima on Nov. 14 was 0.29 microsievert per hour, 4.5 times greater than that in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward.

An Asahi Shimbun exit poll conducted in 30 polling stations on Nov. 17 showed that 60 percent of voters disapproved of Seto's performance in the 32 months after the nuclear disaster, while 37 percent supported him.

The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has recently clarified that the government will take measures to tackle the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, and will also bear part of the costs for future decontamination and related work.

However, the loss of the LDP-backed incumbent in the prefectural capital could affect the Abe administration's countermeasures and reconstruction plans.

More compensation for long-term evacuees

November 23, 2013

Panel decides to pay additional damages to long-term Fukushima evacuees

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201311230054

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government panel responsible for deciding compensation levels for the victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster said Nov. 22 that people who face prolonged evacuation from their homes will receive additional sums.

Lump-sum damages will primarily be paid to residents of the “difficult-to-return zones,” where annual radiation levels exceed 50 millisieverts. In these areas, the government evacuation order is expected to remain in place for the foreseeable future, and full-fledged decontamination and infrastructure recovery operations have yet to be planned.

The decision reflects a new policy by the government and ruling coalition to bolster support to evacuees on the assumption some will never be able to return to their homes.

The nuclear damage compensation dispute resolution center, set up under the science ministry, will include the new damages in additional compensation guidelines to be compiled in December.

Residents from areas under evacuation orders have already received lump-sum damages to help compensate for mental stress and suffering. Those payments ranged from 1.2 million yen to 6 million yen (\$12,000 to \$60,000), depending on where they lived.

The additional compensation is also expected to cover people who lived in two other evacuation zones with lower radiation levels in the towns of Okuma and Futaba, which co-host the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The damages will be paid regardless of whether residents eventually return home. Evacuees who are not able to return will receive more than those from areas where evacuation orders are lifted.

The dispute resolution center also proposed that evacuees who bought new homes after they relocated receive additional compensation equivalent to 50-100 percent of the difference between the value of land where they lived before the accident and the newly bought land.

Rice harvesting in Fukushima

November 22, 2013

FUKUSHIMA: Rice farmers sense glimmer of hope after nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/globe/feature/rice/AJ201311220012>

By TAKEMICHI NISHIBORI/ The Asahi Shimbun Staff Writer

It is early October and an idyllic scene is unfolding beneath a clear autumn sky. As red dragonflies flit by, the air is filled with the melodious hum of combine harvester reaping through rice fields.

Residents of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture have been waiting nearly three years to witness this moment.

The reason? The 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant rendered the land useless for planting rice.

“It is really a good feeling to see the rice piled up in the vats again,” says 49-year-old Kazuya Igari.

When he began planting again this year, Igari faced a very different situation compared with before the nuclear catastrophe.

He lived 200 meters from the coast. His home was destroyed in the tsunami generated by the Great East Japan Earthquake. His tractor and other farming equipment were also swept away, and his rice paddies were submerged in mud. He now lives in temporary housing with his 49-year-old wife and 25-year-old daughter.

Igari farms a plot about 1.2 hectares wide. The land is actually rented from a friend. It lies more than 4 kilometers further inland than his own farm.

Like most rice farmers in town, this is a side job for Igari. Yet this didn't stop him from buying used farming equipment to go about his tasks.

“These paddies give me a purpose in life. I didn't want to give them up,” he explains.

At the end of April, Igari sprinkled potassium chloride on the decontaminated paddies. The chemical compound was donated by the town to help prevent rice plants absorbing radioactive cesium. A few days later, Igari was tilling the fields on a second-hand tractor he had just bought.

“I was so happy to be back. Nothing brings me more joy than planting rice,” he said.

Hirono lies within a radius of 20 to 30 kilometers from the stricken power plant. Two days after the nuclear accident, triggering reactor meltdowns, the town's population of 5,500 or so was ordered to evacuate.

In April of that year, rice farming was effectively banned under the special measures law on nuclear emergency preparedness.

The restrictions were lifted last year, but the town asked farmers to hold off from planting rice until the effects of radiation were better understood.

The town joined forces with 30 farmers to begin trial cultivations at each of the area's 39 water sources. In the end, all the harvested rice fell within permissible levels of radioactive material, so the town lifted its calls for restraint and the farmers were permitted to grow rice freely again from this year.

After two years of neglect, though, the town's paddies were overgrown with weeds. The surface layer had been churned up, adding to the decontamination. The grass was deeply embedded in the soil. Igari worried that his rice would grow too tall if the nutrient content of the soil was too high. His fears were well-founded: The rice did shoot up, and subsequently collapsed when the ears finally sprouted in August. The yield was around 80 percent of a normal harvest.

The harvested rice will be bought by the government through an agricultural cooperative and then stored. This removes concerns about the rice not selling because of radiation fears. The rice will be stored for five years, and then used as livestock feed.

"We worked so hard to improve soil conditions and the like because we wanted to make delicious rice for people to eat. Part of me still feels frustrated with the situation," Igari lamented.

The town says that only 101 of its 320 or so rice farmers planted rice this year.

There are some farmers, though, who are ready to face down public fears by selling directly to consumers without going through the cooperative.

Ryohei Niitsuma, 54, began keeping ducks on his rice paddies from around 10 years ago in an attempt to eradicate bugs and weeds without using agricultural chemicals or fertilizers. His organic rice proved popular, and he had a substantial customer base throughout the country. Before the earthquake, Niitsuma had over 100 buyers from the Tokyo metropolitan area and elsewhere. This year, though, around 30 customers have canceled their orders, saying they have small children to worry about.

Last year, he ignored the town's calls for restraint. Niitsuma began planting rice and also released ducks on 1.5 hectares of his 3.5-hectare plot. In autumn, he harvested around 400 bags of rice. A local agricultural cooperative checked them for radioactive particles and they all fell below detectable limits. After safety levels were confirmed this year, Niitsuma planted rice seedlings on 5 hectares of land. This included fields he is taking care of for neighbors who abandoned their farms.

He said he was egged on by his satisfied customers. Immediately after the earthquake and tsunami disaster, with rice planting on hold, Niitsuma put down his scythe and picked up his car keys. With his 55-year-old wife, Masae, he took a road trip around Japan to visit customers. The purpose was to extend his greetings and explain to everyone that his family was safe and well. Niitsuma was met with a flood of support. Customers repeatedly told him that “nothing tastes as good as your rice, so please grow it again next year.”

When night falls in Niitsuma’s neighborhood, many nearby homes remain unlit. This is because they are empty. With many part-time farms, elderly couples were left to farm alone when sons and daughters evacuated with their children and never returned. The task often proved too much, and farms were abandoned. Niitsuma says he knows people who have already bought houses in the nearby city of Iwaki.

“The government can repair the roads and water service, but the sight of rice harvesting will never return unless we have the farmers,” he says.

In better times, the town was alive with the laughter of children as they headed to and came back from school through fields of rice stalks fluttering in the wind. Niitsuma clings to the hope that this scene is not gone forever.

Cotton crop in Fukushima

November 23, 2013

Cotton crop harvested in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131123_23.html

Members of a non-profit organization and volunteers have harvested cotton in a disaster-hit town in Fukushima Prefecture.

The NPO started cultivating cotton last year, making use of farm land that became idle after the March 11 tsunami and nuclear accident. The purpose is to help revive agriculture in the region.

In May, the group planted cotton on a total of 30 ares in 3 locations around the town of Hirono.

The crop is now ready to be harvested.

More than 70 volunteers, including people from Tokyo, joined local residents and carefully hand-picked the hanging cotton balls.

No pesticide or chemical fertilizer was used to grow the cotton variety that turns brown as it grows.

A woman from Tokyo said she had never harvested cotton and it was interesting to see that so much cotton had grown. She said **their efforts should contribute to the reconstruction of the region.**

The NPO is growing cotton on a total of 3 hectares of land, including that in Hirono Town, this year, and aims to harvest 1 ton of cotton, or 3 times as much as last year's harvest.

The cotton will be shipped as a raw material to make T shirts and towels

Lump-sum compensation for some evacuees

November 22, 2013

Fukushima residents who can't return home to receive lump-sum compensation

A government panel to settle disputes over nuclear accident compensation is set to provide damages in lump-sum payments to residents of areas feared to be uninhabitable over a long period due to the nuclear crisis, panel sources said.

The Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation made the decision after the government abandoned the return home of all residents of areas hit by the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The committee will pay damages for mental anguish to residents of areas that are likely to remain uninhabitable for a long period.

The panel will work out standards for calculating the amounts of compensation based on damages that it has been paying to those who will unlikely be allowed to return home in the foreseeable future -- 100,000 yen a month. The standards will be incorporated in new guidelines for nuclear accident compensation that the panel will draw up by the end of this year.

Residents of areas where the annual radiation dose exceeds 50 millisieverts and evacuation orders are expected to be in effect for at least six years after the crisis broke out in March 2011 will be eligible for such compensation. Furthermore, residents of areas surrounded by zones expected to remain uninhabitable for a long time and who will face difficulties in their daily lives after returning home will also be entitled to such payments.

The panel has paid 12 months worth of compensation to residents of areas with radiation dosages of up to 20 millisieverts per year and where preparations are being made to lift evacuation orders, 24 months worth of damages to those of districts with radiation dosages exceeding 20 millisieverts but below 50 millisieverts and where residency is restricted. Moreover, residents of zones where they are unlikely to be able to return in the foreseeable future have received 60 months of compensation payments.

Under the new guidelines, such compensation payments will be discontinued one year after the lifting of evacuation orders. However, further compensation will be provided in lump-sum payments to residents of areas where evacuation orders will likely be prolonged.

The panel released a rough estimate at a Nov. 22 meeting that if an evacuation order continues for seven years in an area badly contaminated with radioactive substances, each resident will get 9.6 million yen as eight years worth of compensation, including a one-year period following the lifting of the order. The guidelines are also expected to call for compensation to help residents of areas expected to be uninhabitable over a long period secure housing elsewhere.

Incumbent mayors lose election

November 25, 2013

2 more incumbent mayors in Fukushima lose re-election bids

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131125p2a00m0na008000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The incumbent mayors in the city of Nihonmatsu and the town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture lost their re-election bids on Nov. 24, falling victim to nuclear radiation fears like four other incumbents this year.

The incumbent mayor in the prefectural capital of Fukushima was defeated by a newcomer in the mayoral election on Nov. 17. The incumbents also lost in mayoral elections in Koriyama in April, Tomioka in July and Iwaki in September, respectively.

Hiroshi Shinno, a 62-year-old former city assemblyman, edged incumbent Nihonmatsu Mayor Keiichi Miho, 64, who had sought a third-term, by garnering 15,632 votes, compared with 14,930 votes for Miho. Both ran as independents.

The city's population dropped to 56,909 as of Nov. 1 this year from 59,656 on March 1, 2011, just before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami which triggered the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Miho said, "We proceeded with decontamination work but concerns about radiation were conveyed to leaders of municipalities. The election campaign was held in the middle of a big tide against incumbents."

In Hirono near the crippled nuclear power plant, former town assemblyman Satoshi Endo, 52, defeated incumbent Mayor Motohoshi Yamada, 65, who had sought a third-term.

The town was designated as an emergency evacuation preparatory district in the wake of the nuclear crisis. The advisory was lifted in March 2012, prompting the town to relocate its town hall functions from Iwaki in the prefecture. But of 5,235 residents, only 1,191 have returned home as of Nov. 22.

Yamada said in his concession speech, "The central government's efforts have been slow, and I could not explain the restoration work to town residents in a visible way."

Only one third of evacuees willing to return

November 25, 2013

Only a third of evacuees want to return

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131125_18.html

Only one-third of people evacuated from areas near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant are willing to return to their homes, even if evacuation orders were lifted now.

Parts of Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture, are designated evacuation zones.

The city and the Reconstruction Agency conducted a survey in August and September this year of 5,677 households originally from the evacuation region.

Among them, 3,543 households, or 62 percent, responded.

When asked if they will return home once the evacuation orders are lifted, 1,039 households, or about 29 percent, said they want to do so.

44 percent of them said they are undecided at this point and 26 percent said they will not go back.

When the undecided group was asked what is needed to make a decision, many said information on things such as when schools, hospitals and shops will be reopened.

They also want to know when radiation levels will go down and how much decontamination work has been done.

Minamisoma officials say they will reflect the results of the survey in compiling the city's residents return plan.

Fukushima "anpo" persimmons production resumed

November 26, 2013

PHOTO: Fukushima dried persimmons being readied for market

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201311260013>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

For the first time since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, local farmers are preparing a delicacy known as "anpo" persimmon.

Farm workers have been busy hanging peeled persimmons for drying in farm buildings in Date, Fukushima Prefecture.

After the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, persimmons grown in Fukushima Prefecture were found to have levels of radioactive cesium that exceeded central government standards. Farmers decided to suspend production and shipment of the dried persimmons.

However, testing of the fruit last July showed that radiation levels were below government standards in some parts of the prefecture, including what was once the town of Yanagawa. That finding led the central and prefectural governments to designate Date, to which Yanagawa has been amalgamated, as a model district for the resumption of fruit processing.

In September, a second round of radiation testing was carried out. That spurred 580 farm households, or about half of all anpo persimmon farmers in the northern part of the prefecture, to resume production.

Farmers will still have to test their dried fruits before they can ship them. The drying process normally leads to an increase in levels of radioactive materials per kilogram of fruit. The prefectural government plans to test all finished products before giving the green light for sending the fruit to market.

If the dried persimmons are found to have radiation levels below government standards, they should reach the market from early December.

New industrial and commercial projects for Fukushima

November 28, 2013

JAPEX to build LNG terminal in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201311280057>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. said it will build a new storage terminal for liquefied natural gas at Soma Port in Fukushima Prefecture, which was severely damaged in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

“We want to help areas affected by the disaster to create employment and secure a stable supply of energy,” Shoichi Ishii, JAPEX senior managing director, said at a news conference on Nov. 27.

The oil developer said it plans to import shale gas from North America, and that new facilities will be used mainly to store the imported gas and supply it to a wide range of areas via pipelines.

JAPEX said starting in 2018, it will import 1.2 million tons of LNG made from shale gas produced in Canada each year. The construction of the new LNG terminal in Shinchi, scheduled for completion in 2017, will start in 2014.

JAPEX said it will also construct a 40-kilometer-long pipeline linking the new storage facilities with Natori, Miyagi Prefecture.

A pipeline already exists that connects an LNG station in Niigata Prefecture, located on the Sea of Japan side, and Miyagi Prefecture. The company will join the new pipeline with the existing one, JAPEX officials said.

Because Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures are on the Pacific side of the Japanese archipelago, the planned pipeline will allow JAPEX to ensure a stable supply of LNG, even in the event a disaster, typically an earthquake, hits one side of Japan’s mainland.

Construction costs for the new storage facilities and pipeline are estimated at 60 billion yen (\$587 million).

With the goal of selling electricity to struggling Tokyo Electric Power Co., JAPEX is also considering building an LNG-fired power plant near the planned storage facilities, according to the officials.

Because JAPEX does not have experience operating a thermal plant, it intends to work with other companies to run the new powerhouse.

November 27, 2013

METI to support commercial facility construction in Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/27/national/medi-to-support-commercial-facility-construction-in-fukushima/#.UpX-QCfij9k>

JJI

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry plans to provide financial assistance to municipalities near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to help them build commercial facilities, sources said Wednesday.

The plan is part of an effort to promote the return home of evacuees from areas affected by the meltdown calamity at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. atomic plant, the sources said. Many areas that were evacuated near the stricken complex, however, are too radioactive to be habitable, at least in the coming decades.

METI plans to include some ¥2 billion in related costs in the government's planned supplementary budget for fiscal 2013, which ends next March, the sources said.

The subsidy program will be part of a package of measures that the government plans to compile by the end of this year to assist the nuclear evacuees' return.

Building commercial facilities is considered helpful to bring evacuees back home, but high construction costs, estimated between ¥200 million and ¥300 million per project, are feared to place heavy financial burden on municipalities.

Eligible for the new subsidies are 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, including Tamura, Minamisoma and Kawamata, where an evacuation instruction was given right after the calamity started in March 2011.

The subsidies will cover three-fourths of costs to build commercial facilities that would house supermarkets, restaurants and event spaces.

The ministry initially planned to launch the subsidy program in fiscal 2014. But it decided to move up the schedule after the ruling coalition earlier this month proposed accelerating commercial facility construction in affected areas to speed up post-disaster reconstruction.

Fukushima rice for the Emperor

November 28, 2013

Fukushima rice delivered to Imperial Palace

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131128p2g00m0dm032000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A portion of rice harvested in a Fukushima Prefecture town for the first time after the March 2011 nuclear disaster has been delivered to the Imperial Palace in line with the wish of Emperor Akihito, the Imperial Household Agency said Wednesday.

Farmers in Hirano town, about 20 kilometers south of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, resumed planting rice about three years after voluntarily suspending it following the nuclear meltdown at the station.

Mayor Motohoshi Yamada presented 1,920 kilograms of freshly harvested rice to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in late October. The rice will be used at staff cafeterias of different government offices including the Imperial Household Agency.

On Nov. 20, 120 kg of the rice was delivered to the Imperial Household Agency. After being notified of the delivery, the emperor said, "Because the rice must have been made with struggles (of farmers), we'd like to have some as well," according to the agency. A portion of the rice was delivered to the Imperial Palace on Tuesday, it said.

"It is a sheer pleasure for the town as well as for producers to be able to have the fresh rice harvested for the first time in three years tasted by the emperor. It will be a great encouragement for the reconstruction," Deputy Mayor Koki Kuroda said in a statement.

Fukushima school shuts down

November 29, 2013

Shoei High becomes 1st school to shut down over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131129p2a00m0na013000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Shoei High School, a private school that fell under the nuclear evacuation zone in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, will shut down permanently in March next year due to lingering nuclear radiation fears, becoming the first school in Fukushima Prefecture to do so.

Shoin Gakuen, a school corporation based in prefectural capital Fukushima which runs the high school, applied to the prefectural government for the high school's closure and the application was accepted. Prefectural government officials said Shoei High will be the first school among the prefecture's public and private elementary, junior high and high schools to shut down in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, which was triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Shoin Gakuen plans to enter into compensation negotiations with Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled nuclear plant. It will consider taking the case to the governmental Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center, an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) entity in charge of helping to resolve disputes stemming from the Fukushima disaster.

Shoei High School, situated 22 kilometers north of the crippled nuclear power plant, is the only private high school in the Soma-Futaba district in northeastern Fukushima. It called off classes after the area was designated as an emergency evacuation preparation zone.

The school had 106 students when the crisis began, and many of them were forced to enroll in high schools affiliated with Shoin Gakuen and other prefectural high schools. Twenty-eight students who had been accepted by Shoei High were taken in by other high schools in municipalities where they and their families evacuated.

Although some students and parents asked the high school to reopen, the high school board decided at a meeting in March this year to drop the idea, due to the ongoing nuclear crisis and prolonged decontamination work. The school submitted an application to an advisory panel of private schools in Fukushima Prefecture in mid-June, seeking its permanent closure.

Kazuhiko Sasaki, 57, general affairs chief of the school, noted that while prefectural high schools can count on financial support from the prefectural government and operate satellite schools in evacuation destinations, private high schools struggle financially to continue operations. "It was a tough decision," he said.

Originally started as Haramachi industrial high school in 1957, the school assumed its present name in 1996 by inaugurating an integrated course.

Fukushima school to close due to lack of students

A private senior high school in Fukushima Prefecture will formally close down at the end of March due to a lack of students in the wake of the 2011 nuclear accident.

Shoei High School in Minamisoma City will be the first of the prefecture's schools to close since the accident.

The high school is less than 30 kilometers from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi power plant, and was included in the evacuation zone. All of its 100 students had to transfer to other schools after the accident. The school has been shuttered since then.

The operator of the school says its request to formally close it down has been approved by the prefecture.

It says there will not be enough of students to resume classes, as some areas of the city and nearby municipalities are still no-entry zones.

The operator adds that it will demand compensation from the Tokyo Electric Power Company.

Nov. 29, 2013 - Updated 05:05 UTC

Dealing with exposure

November 30, 2013

Fukushima people learn how to deal with radiation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131201_02.html

Experts on radiation protection have met with residents around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to discuss how to deal with daily exposure to harmful substances.

The International Commission on Radiological Protection on Saturday opened a two-day seminar in Iwaki City in Fukushima Prefecture. About 80 people took part on the first day.

Three residents from the Suetsugi district of the city, 30 kilometers from the plant, said **they use mobile radiation monitors to see where and when their exposure levels changes.**

They said they tested their levels after eating locally-produced food. The results reassured them it was safe to live in the district.

The residents added that many young people have not returned to the area because they are worried about exposure to radiation.

A participant said he wants experts to incorporate the opinions of residents before they decide what measures to take.

Nov. 30, 2013 - Updated 16:30 UTC

Continue your energy-saving efforts

December 2, 2013

Power-saving months start amid tight supply

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131202_15.html

Japan's government and electric power companies are calling for energy-saving measures amid supply concerns in the coming winter months. The power supply in Japan remains tight largely due to the country's nuclear reactors being shut down.

The power-saving period began on Monday throughout many parts of Japan excluding the southern most region covered by Okinawa Electric Power. Households and corporations are being asked to reduce electricity consumption during the daytime on weekdays through March 31st except for the year-end and new-year holidays.

Reduction targets have not been set except for the northern main island of Hokkaido, where power consumption peaks during the winter.

The limited ability to distribute power from the main island to Hokkaido also means the region is

vulnerable to any power shortages.

Officials are targeting a reduction of more than 6 percent from 2010 levels for Hokkaido during its power-saving period from December 9th through March 7th.

Government officials say utilities will be able to generate the minimum amount of electricity to ensure a stable supply if households and companies continue with their energy-saving efforts.

Illuminations for evacuees

December 2, 2013

Illuminations light up Fukushima temporary housing

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131202_33.html

Illuminations were switched on Sunday at a temporary housing facility in Fukushima, northern Japan, to cheer up evacuees of the 2011 March disaster.

A group of people who live in the city of Minami-Soma organized the event ahead of Christmas.

They worked together to set up a tower in the parking lot of a temporary housing complex in the city. They adorned it with some 20,000 LED lights.

The tower, named "Kizuna-joh" or the castle of bonding, emerged brightly against the night sky when the lights were turned on after a countdown ceremony.

Visitors were enchanted by the colorful illuminations. Many took photos.

A group of folk dancing enthusiasts performed, and pork miso soup was served to warm up the audience.

A 70-year-old resident said he was grateful that the illuminations attracted people with whom evacuees can chat. He said that helps boost their usually low spirits.

Masataka Watanabe, the head of the organizing committee, said he hopes the illuminations will help local people and survivors of the disaster deepen their mutual ties.

The lights are turned on daily from 5 pm to 9 pm through January 13th.

Reconstruction Agency opens in Fukushima

December 3, 2013

Reconstruction Agency opens office in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131203_32.html

Japan's Reconstruction Agency has opened an office near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to help evacuees return home.

Seven officials received written appointments to work at the office in the town hall of Kawauchi Village on Tuesday.

The office is the first to be set up by the agency in an area covering many evacuation zones.

The officials plan to cooperate with authorities of the village and nearby municipalities to restore water, sewage and trash removal services.

The head of the office says it will work to ease residents' anxieties about water safety and other issues, to encourage them to return as soon as possible.

Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo says he hopes the office will contribute greatly to helping residents return home.

Okuma sets up own compensation fund

December 3, 2013

Fukushima town to add supplementary compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131203_19.html

A town near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has decided to supplement compensation from the plant operator with additional payments for some residents.

All the residents of Okuma evacuated from the town following the nuclear accident. In December of last year, the town was divided into 3 zones according to radiation levels.

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, is planning to compensate people for household appliances and furniture they have had to abandon.

But the central government, which determines the standard for compensation, has set different amounts for each zone.

For example, a family with parents and 2 children in the zone where it is most difficult to return would receive about 67,000 dollars. But a similar family in the 2 other zones would receive some 50,000 dollars.

Okuma town officials say the disparity could divide the community and weigh down its rebuilding efforts. They have decided to set up their own town fund to make up the difference.

The town plans to implement the plan before the end of the fiscal year in March. Okuma will be the first municipality to offer supplementary compensation for the nuclear accident.

Fukushima voters show their frustration

December 3, 2013

Fukushima voter discontent

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/03/editorials/fukushima-voter-discontent/#.Up79eSfij9k>

Incumbents have suffered one defeat after another in city mayoral elections in Fukushima Prefecture — where more than 140,000 residents remain evacuees some two years and nine months after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant

The losing streak that happened this year in the cities of Koriyama, Iwaki, Fukushima and Nihonmatsu reflects local voters' frustration over the lagging decontamination of local communities from the radioactive fallout from the March 2011 nuclear disaster. Meanwhile, Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled plant continues to leak radiation-contaminated water into the environment.

The Abe administration should heed the message voters delivered in the mayoral elections: Local residents are unhappy with the slow pace of reconstruction from the disasters and want the government to make greater efforts.

In the Nov. 18 city election for Fukushima, the prefecture's capital, the Liberal Democratic Party-backed incumbent Takanori Seto failed in his bid for a fourth term as he gained less than half the votes of independent winner Kaoru Kobayashi. Mayor Keiichi Miho of Nihonmatsu, who won the election four years ago uncontested, saw his third-term bid crushed in the Nov. 24 poll.

Such outcomes in Fukushima Prefecture are in sharp contrast with poll results in other prefectures hit hardest by the earthquake and tsunami. Many incumbents have survived the elections held over the past two years. For example, Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai comfortably won a third term in October.

The difference is of course the impact from the nuclear disaster. Tens of thousands of people in Fukushima Prefecture are forced to live away from their hometowns due to the radioactive fallout. Decontamination work is lagging as it often proves difficult to find sites to store co

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According to local media reports, roughly 6,000 people in the city of Fukushima — or nearly 2 percent of the city's population — have moved to Niigata and Akita prefectures out of fear of radiation. Many of these evacuees are young couples with small children — who are most vulnerable to the detrimental side effects of radiation exposure — and they view radiation readings in their hometowns as a key gauge for determining whether they can return.

There is no telling when life will return to municipalities closer to the nuclear power plant. In the town of Hirono — located 20 to 30 km from the Fukushima No. 1 plant — only a quarter of its roughly 5,200 population has returned even after its designation as “evacuation prepared area” was lifted in September 2011. The town's incumbent mayor was also defeated in a Nov. 24 election.

Last month, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe indicated that the government would consider using taxpayer money to fund decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture — a change from the earlier position that Tepco would cover all such costs.

The Abe administration says the government will take charge of cleaning up the mess from the nuclear disaster, including the problem of contaminated water leaking daily from the crippled plant. It needs to take Fukushima voters' discontent seriously and take action — not just offer empty promises.

278,000 evacuees still

December 5, 2013

278,000 evacuees remain nearly 1,000 days after March 2011 disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131205p2g00m0dm024000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- As many as 278,000 people remained evacuees Nov. 14 as a result of the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami that devastated northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, the Reconstruction Agency said Wednesday, 1,000 days after the disaster.

The number marked a fall from a peak of about 470,000.

The evacuees include 49,554 who have left Fukushima Prefecture, where the disaster caused a serious nuclear crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi power plant, the agency said.

The earthquake-tsunami disaster killed 15,883 people and left 2,651 others unaccounted for as of Nov. 8. Search for the missing still continues in the tsunami-hit coastal zones.

An additional 2,688 deaths, including those from evacuation-caused health deterioration and suicides, were related to the disaster by the end of March this year.

Compensation limit extended to ten years

December 4, 2013

Fukushima people can seek compensation for decade

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131205_01.html

Japan's Diet has extended the period for people seeking compensation for damages caused by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The previous 3-year limit has been lengthened to 10 years.

The Upper House passed a bill for the enactment on Wednesday. The ruling coalition parties proposed the bill as the current civil law limits the right to seek compensation from the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company to up to 3 years from the accident.

The new law notes that some people affected by the 2011 accident have been unable to seek compensation because they are having difficulties in calculating the damages. Many residents still live in temporarily housing.

The new law will enable people affected by the nuclear disaster to file a compensation demand with TEPCO until 10 years after the accident.

The law also calls on the government to improve the consultation system and provide information to disaster-affected people so that they can receive compensation as early as possible.

Most evacuees have given up hope of returning

December 7, 2013

Over 60% of evacuees from Fukushima towns don't plan to return home

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312070045>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

More evacuees from the two towns that co-host the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have given up hope of returning home, a government survey found Dec. 6.

According to a Reconstruction Agency survey conducted in October, 67.1 percent of respondents from Okuma and 64.7 percent from Futaba said they had decided not to return. Those numbers were up from 42.3 percent and 30.4 percent, respectively, in a January survey, which used slightly different wording.

Nearly all residents of the two towns evacuated from their homes after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

In the latest survey, respondents were asked to choose reasons for their decision not to return home. Multiple choices were allowed.

Seventy-three percent of respondents from Okuma said radiation levels have not fallen. Sixty-eight percent of those from Futaba said it will take too much time before they can return to their hometown. Only 8.6 percent of respondents from Okuma and 10.3 percent from Futaba said they want to return. Eighteen percent of those in their 70s or older from Futaba said they want to go home.

The survey covered the heads of 5,043 households in Okuma and of 3,394 households in Futaba, and received valid responses from about half.

December 6, 2013

70% of Fukushima evacuees: won't return home

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131206_38.html

Japan's Reconstruction Agency has found that nearly 70 percent of people who evacuated from towns hosting the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant do not plan to return.

The agency surveyed evacuees from Okuma and Futaba towns in October. All residents of the towns left after the plant's nuclear accident.

Of around 2,760 households from Okuma, 67 percent said they've given up on returning. Nine percent said they want to. 20 percent were undecided.

Among 1,730 households from Futaba, 65 percent said they won't return, 10 percent said they hope to, and 17 percent were undecided.

Of the respondents from both towns who said they will not return, around 70 percent cited concerns about the safety of the damaged plant and radiation exposure.

About 65 percent said it will take too long before they are allowed to go back.

Reconstruction minister Takumi Nemoto told reporters that his agency will consult the towns to draw up plans to build public housing for evacuees and implement reconstruction projects.

Dec. 6, 2013 - Updated 07:48 UTC

Evacuees families still separated

December 9, 2013

Survey: Families in Fukushima Prefecture still apart after nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/analysis/AJ201312090065>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster are still being forced to live apart from their families more than two and a half years later due to cramped temporary housing and for other reasons, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

Based on data from municipal governments, The Asahi Shimbun compared the number of housing units for evacuees from seven towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture, all of whose residents have been ordered to evacuate, with the number of households in the seven municipalities counted as of March 2011.

The findings showed the number of units is 1.3 times larger than before the disaster, whereas the number of residents had been declining in all the seven towns and villages.

The number of housing units is about 60 percent higher regarding Iitate, some 40 percent more in connection with Katsurao, and about 30 percent greater regarding Namie and Okuma, respectively.

According to the survey, many large families in rural areas are still living separated, more than 1,000 days after the nuclear disaster began to unfurl, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

An Iitate village government official said temporary housing and apartments in Fukushima city, where many evacuees currently reside, are typically too small for large families to live together.

There are also many cases where members of big families are living in coastal areas and inland regions separately, according to the village government official. The official said there are many jobs related to post-disaster reconstruction in coastal areas, while inland regions, typically far from the nuclear plant, are believed to be safer.

What is at issue is that many elderly people are being forced to live apart from younger family members, meaning that support by local governments is becoming necessary. There are currently 140,000 nuclear disaster evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture.

Half of the evacuees are from municipalities other than the seven towns and villages, meaning a number of individuals in wider areas may be separated from their families, as well.

(This article was written by Takayuki Kihara and Shinichi Fujiwara.)

More money for evacuees who can't return

December 9, 2013

Panel considers more payments to nuclear evacuees

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131209_39.html

A government panel has proposed that Tokyo Electric Power Company make additional payments to people who cannot return to their homes near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The science ministry panel made the proposal on Monday for evacuees who have no prospect of

returning home due to high radiation levels in their communities.

These evacuees have already received about 75,000 dollars per person for their mental stress and suffering.

The panel has been discussing supplementary payments to compensate for their prolonged evacuation.

It proposes that the plant operator pay a set amount of between 25,000 and 65,000 dollars per person.

Panel members also discussed whether to increase the payments for housing.

Many evacuees say the compensation they have received is not enough to enable them to build new homes where they have been relocated.

The panel is to decide on the additional compensation at its next meeting scheduled for December 26th.
Dec. 9, 2013 - Updated 07:58 UTC

World beautiful bays

Miyagi's Matsushima Bay joins world's most beautiful bays club

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201312090048>

By YASUSHI SATO/ Staff Writer

MATSUSHIMA, Miyagi Prefecture—Matsushima Bay in disaster-hit Miyagi Prefecture has become the first Japanese member of a France-based environmental group's "Most Beautiful Bays in the World Club," a town official said.

The decision was announced Dec. 6 at the club's general meeting held in Cambodia, the official said.

The club said Matsushima Bay meets the criteria for membership, including high natural value and being an iconic symbol for local people. Forty-one bays from 30 countries, including Mont Saint-Michel Bay in France, are members of the club.

Matsushima Bay was already considered one of Japan's top three coastal scenic spots.

Takeo Ohashi, the mayor of Matsushima town, said he hopes the bay's membership will add momentum to work to rebuild from the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Tasty, safe rice from Fukushima

December 9, 2013

Test harvest of rice less than radioactivity limit

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131209_13.html

A village affected by fallout from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant says rice planted in its most contaminated area has logged radioactivity below the national safety standard after the paddies were decontaminated.

Most parts of Iitate Village in Fukushima were designated as no-entry or uninhabitable zones after the municipality was hit by fallout from the 2011 nuclear accident. Iitate is about 40 kilometers from the plant.

In June this year, the villagers planted a crop of rice in the Nagadoro District **after removing the paddy's contaminated topsoil**, to test how much radioactivity would be absorbed by the rice.

They harvested the crop in October.

The villagers then asked the government to examine 3 kilograms of the rice for radioactive substances.

They say all the samples were below 10 becquerels per kilogram, which is one tenth the government safety limit.

Agriculture in the no-entry zone has been banned. **But the villagers are planning to test-plant rice again next year to study the affects of nuclear fallout. They hope the data collecting will help pave the way for a future resumption of agriculture in some parts of the village.**

Rice from Fukushima served in govt. dining room

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131209_32.html

An event has been held in Tokyo to demonstrate the safety of rice grown in areas that have been evacuated around the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Rice was cultivated in several decontaminated fields in Yamakiya District in Kawamata Town and Iitate Village as part of a test. The 2 areas were designated as evacuation zones after the 2011 nuclear accident.

Officials from Fukushima Prefecture say no radioactive materials were detected in any of the harvested rice.

540 kilograms of the rice will be served in a government office complex in Tokyo for 9 days from Monday.

Senior Vice Environment Minister Shinji Inoue and Parliamentary Vice Environment Minister Tomoko Ukishima tasted rice balls made of the crop on the first day.

Inoue said the rice tasted good especially when he thought about the great effort that went into cultivating the crop.

A farmer from Kawamata Town said he will continue to cultivate rice now that he knows that it's possible to grow a tasty product if the paddy fields are properly decontaminated. He said he travelled from his temporary home to the paddy to tend the rice as it grew.

Dec. 9, 2013 - Updated 05:50 UTC

Limit on compensation

December 10, 2013

Fukushima evacuees could get up to 6.5 million yen more in compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131210p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Evacuees unable to return to their homes in radioactive areas near the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant may get an additional 2.5 to 6.5 million yen each in lump sum compensation under a new policy draft released by a government committee on Dec. 9.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's evaluative committee for disputes over compensation for nuclear disasters released the draft stating that the fresh funds would cover emotional damage for people who lived in areas for which no return is foreseeable in the near future. On top of the initial compensation figure of 7.5 million yen, the additional payment would bring total compensation to 10 to 14 million yen per person. The exact amounts will be announced on Dec. 26.

The committee used compensation systems such as those for home losses caused by landslides and loss of life caused by traffic accidents as references for deciding the compensation amount. The new compensation amounts would cover evacuees from areas with over 50 millisieverts of radiation per year, and aims to support evacuees in their efforts to rebuild their lives.

Meanwhile, the draft also included a new limit on an existing compensation system that provides 100,000 yen per month to evacuees. Under the new system, payments would stop one year after an area's evacuation order is lifted.

Furthermore, the draft includes compensation of 50 to 75 percent of the difference between the value of an evacuee's lost house at the time it was newly built and the value of the home right before the disaster, even in cases where the homes were wooden structures over 48 years old. If evacuees bought land in their new locales at prices higher than in their former hometowns, they will be compensated 50 to 100 percent of the difference. The committee will also consider compensation for those who were living in rentals at the time of the disaster.

Panel sets limit on compensation to Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312100062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A government screening panel has compiled a plan to set a cap on compensation to residents who face prolonged evacuation from their homes due to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, angering evacuees and a mayor from the affected towns.

The panel on disputes for nuclear damage compensation wants to set the limit on compensation payments to evacuees in amounts ranging from 10 million yen to 14 million yen (\$96,820 to \$135,548).

According to the proposal made by the science and technology ministry panel on Dec. 9, Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, will make additional lump-sum damage compensation payments ranging from 2.5 million yen to 6.5 million yen to residents of "difficult-to-return" zones. These zones are where annual radiation doses exceed 50 millisieverts, and evacuees are not allowed to return for at least five years from March 2012. They were once home to about 25,000 residents.

Koichi Miyamoto, mayor of Tomioka in the zone, criticized the timing of the panel's plan to set a limit.

"It is impossible to decide on the entire amount of compensation while evacuees are still in the middle of their evacuations," he said.

Miyamoto added that it wouldn't be possible to declare the rebuilding plan for the affected areas complete unless evacuees can return to their normal lives.

Under the plan, the base amount of the "last" compensation payment will be incorporated into additional guidelines to be compiled by the end of the year.

The panel's secretariat estimated the total compensation to be paid to evacuees to range from 10 million yen to 14 million yen, using three unrelated circumstances to arrive at the amounts; compensation of 12 million yen that residents will receive from TEPCO if their evacuation lasts 10 years due to the nuclear disaster; base compensation of 28 million yen that bereaved family members, who lose their primary wage earner, will receive from a person who caused their loss in a traffic accident; and special payments for relief and compensation ranging from 6 million yen to 8 million yen that residents, who cannot live in their homes due to natural disasters such as landslides, are eligible to receive from municipalities.

However, as the residents of the difficult-to-return zones, the major target, have already received compensation payments of 7.5 million yen, this amount will be deducted from the estimated total amount. As a result, the additional damage compensation payments would range from 2.5 million yen to 6.5 million yen.

Other than the 25,000 residents of the difficult-to-return zones, about 600 people of the zones where residences are restricted, and the zones being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order in the towns of Okuma and Futaba, are also included in the plan.

In these towns, 96 percent of each population come from the difficult-to-return zones. Moreover, no full-scale decontamination and infrastructure rebuilding plans have yet been made.

For other evacuees apart from those approximately 25,600 evacuees, the monthly compensation of 100,000 yen for mental distress will continue to be paid, but will be halted after a year of the lifting of their evacuation order.

Residents of the zones where living restrictions will apply in Okuma and Futaba have received compensation payments of 3.9 million yen, while people residing in the zones being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order have received 3.3 million yen.

The ministry's panel will consider how to make up the differences between 3.3 million yen or 3.9 million yen and the 7.5 million yen that the residents of the difficult-to-return zones have received.

However, local residents lashed out at the panel's proposal, including the possibility of compensation being halted while they are being forced to endure an endless evacuation.

"I cannot understand this," said a 62-year-old man who has been living in temporary housing in Iwaki after evacuating from his home in Okuma.

The Okuma resident has been searching for work after losing his job due to the nuclear accident. Although he and his wife receive monthly compensation payments for psychological duress of 100,000 yen each, he said it is difficult for them to save half of their total payments.

He said that compensation should be halted only after evacuees have secured homes and employment.

Fukushima red apples a success

December 11, 2013

Fukushima 'kizuna' kanji apples prove a big local hit

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201312110008>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Hisaiichi Abe is a fruit grower in Fukushima who saw shipments of his Fuji apples drastically reduced after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Although his harvests routinely passed tests showing they contained no radioactive materials, the shipments of Abe's apples were halved immediately after the onset of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Now, the 76-year-old Abe has seen an increase in his shipments, thanks to Fuji apples emblazoned with the kanji character “kizuna” (bond) on the outside of their skin.

The requests for the kizuna apples came from organizations in such municipalities as Minami-Soma in Fukushima Prefecture and Miyako in Iwate Prefecture, which plan to distribute them free of charge at events. Abe said he plans to ship a total of about 1,500 of the apples this season.

To make the kizuna apples, Abe pastes a film on each individual apple in the shape of the kanji character. The film blocks sunlight, preventing the apple's skin underneath from turning red as the fruit ripens. When the film is peeled away before shipment, the kizuna kanji stands out in yellow on the red apple.

Thanks to the popularity of the kizuna apples, Abe's shipments have recovered this year to pre-quake levels.

Winter without Nuclear Power (Video from NHK)

December 11, 2013

Winter without Nuclear Power

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201312111822.html>

Gov't has called on the Japanese population to use electricity "sensibly"
Biodiesel (cooking oil) for generators
Energy conservation measures (hard winter expected)
Power consumption warnings for customers

Return or not return?

December 13, 2013

Fukushima evacuees face dilemma over return to former no-entry zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312130073>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture--Kiyokazu Watanabe, his wife and his mother have returned to their home in an eastern strip of this city near the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, determined to end their lives as nuclear evacuees.

“Nothing is sweeter than being in my home,” Watanabe, 66, said.

His son’s family, however, has no plans to return to the same Miyakoji district area even after it becomes the first Fukushima evacuation zone to have that designation lifted in spring next year. The family’s fear of radiation is behind the decision.

Residents of the eastern strip of Miyakoji are currently struggling to decide whether to return to their homes within 20 kilometers of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The area was initially listed as a no-entry zone, but it is now designated as a “zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order.”

Residents of the zone have been allowed to stay in their homes for more than a month to prepare for their eventual return.

As of Dec. 1, however, only 30 of the 117 households from the area were staying in their homes for an extended period.

Radiation levels are not the only factors the evacuees must consider in deciding whether to return to Miyakoji.

Residents of evacuation zones are receiving monthly damages of 100,000 yen (\$973) each. The government’s Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation on Dec. 9 presented a draft guideline to end the payments one year after the evacuation order is lifted.

Watanabe, his 61-year-old wife and his 89-year-old mother used to live as evacuees in an apartment house elsewhere in Tamura. They returned to their home in Miyakoji in August.

Watanabe, who is now engaged in radioactive cleanup work, said he has misgivings about his finances but is happy that evacuation zone designation will be lifted.

“I want to get the feeling that things are moving forward,” he said.

Annual airborne radiation doses remain above 1 millisievert in the mountainous terrain around Watanabe’s home, part of a hamlet of about 10 farming families, even after the central government’s decontamination work was completed in June.

Watanabe’s son and his family will remain in a leased shelter in central Tamura.

Likewise, Seisaku Yoshida, a 65-year-old farmer from Watanabe’s hamlet, said he will stay in his shelter in Tamura after the designation is lifted. But he is preparing to plant rice next spring in a paddy close to his home.

Yoshida decided to stay near the family of his son, who has given up on returning to Miyakoji, and remain at his home only during busy farming seasons.

Yoshida’s unattended house, however, has been damaged by rats and mold, creating a dilemma for the farmer. But he wonders if it is worthwhile to spend large sums of money to repair a house that his son’s family will not return to.

A contractor told Yoshida that repairs would cost nearly 5 million yen.

“Perhaps I would be happier if I kept the repairs to a minimum and used the money to live with my grandson and his family,” he said.

The Asahi Shimbun in October conducted a survey of the 117 households in the eastern strip of the Miyakoji district, and received responses from 60.

Sixteen said they would return to their homes if the evacuation order was lifted, while seven said they would not do so. Twenty-four households said they would not return now but would do so eventually. The remaining 13 were undecided.

The 37 households with no clear-cut conclusion were asked to give a maximum of three conditions for their return. The most common answer was “stabilization of the situation at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant,” chosen by 29 households, followed by “further reductions in radiation levels,” picked by 26 households.

(This article was written by Keisuke Sato and Shinichi Fujiwara.)

Resumption of rice planting in Minamisoma (by majority vote)

December 14, 2013

Minami-Soma OKs rice planting for 1st time in 4 years

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201312140047

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--The rice fields have lain fallow in this northern coastal city since tsunami deluged the area in 2011. But now, for the first time since then, farmers will start planting rice for harvest on about 3,200 hectares of paddies.

A general meeting of a council consisting of city officials and an agricultural association decided Dec. 13 to allow farmers to plant anew.

The farmers voluntarily refrained from growing rice after the onset of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Although the paddies to be replanted are located outside the evacuation zone, the central government continues to prohibit the cultivation of rice on about 5,300 hectares of the fields within the evacuation zone. It is expected to decide on an extent of the restriction for 2014 in January at the earliest.

Farmers planted rice on about 123 hectares of paddies in Minami-Soma on an experimental basis earlier this year.

But partly due to a delay in decontamination work at the paddies, radioactive cesium exceeding the government's safety limit of 100 becquerels per kilogram was detected in some of the crops from those fields.

At the Dec. 13 meeting, **one farmer said that they should wait until safety is confirmed before going ahead with replanting.**

“(The council) should hold a thorough investigation to determine why radioactive cesium is exceeding the safety limit,” the farmer said.

However, with the city pledging to fully support the restart of rice growing, the Dec. 13 meeting decided on the resumption of rice planting by majority vote.

Higher rate of obesity in Fukushima children

December 13, 2013

Restricted movement taking obesity toll on Fukushima kids

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/13/national/restricted-movement-taking-obesity-toll-on-fukushima-kids/#.Uqtz6Cfij9k>

JJI

Children from Fukushima Prefecture continue to show high obesity rates due to the impact of the nuclear plant calamity that continues to restrict their outdoor activities, education ministry data showed on Friday.

The proportion of obese children in Fukushima was the highest of all the prefectures in six out of the 13 grades from kindergarten to high school in fiscal 2013, which began last April.

The outcome is closely linked to restrictions on children’s outdoor activities and changes in their lifestyles after they had to evacuate or transfer to other schools due to the triple-meltdown catastrophe that started in March 2011 at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, said officials at the ministry and the prefectural board of education.

The proportion of children from the prefecture who are at least 20 percent heavier than the standard, calculated by age and height, was above the national average for all 13 grades. The figure for Fukushima was the highest for six grades and between second and fourth for the remaining seven grades.

Between fiscal 2006 and 2010, the proportion was the highest of all prefectures in no more than one grade. In fiscal 2012, the number soared to seven grades.

According to the prefectural board of education, the number of public schools imposing restrictions on children's outdoor activities due to radiation concerns decreased to 56, or 7 percent of the total, as of May. The decline did not change the children's lack of exercise, however, according to the board.

"We aim to reinforce guidance on eating habits, as well as improving children's physical strength," a prefectural official said.

On a nationwide basis, the average proportion of obese children has remained almost flat since fiscal 2011. The average height has remained at the same level for around 10 years, while the average weight has declined slightly since fiscal 2006, according to the survey.

Minamisoma's flowers

December 15, 2013

PHOTO: Flowers from Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201312150008>



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--With Christmas just around the corner, staff at Nemoto Engei in the city's Haramachi district are busy shipping pots of cyclamen.

About 30 varieties of the flower, which comes in various colors, are shipped to the Kanto region and Sendai, capital of nearby Miyagi Prefecture.

Operator Shuji Nemoto, 61, had grown the flower for more than 40 years in a farm in the city's Odaka district, which is within 20 kilometers of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Nemoto was forced to evacuate, but his passion for growing cyclamen never left him.

Nemoto resumed his cyclamen business in December last year, borrowing an unused plastic greenhouse from a friend.

He did not want to leave the city where he was born and raised, he said.

Last year Nemoto shipped 3,000 pots, far fewer than the pre-earthquake levels of around 15,000 pots.

“I hope the flowers will let our customers know that we are still hanging in here,” Nemoto said.

Shoddy decontamination work

December 16, 2013

Contaminated waste at public apartments shocks Fukushima residents



A pile of contaminated waste is placed in a park at a public apartment complex in Shirakawa, Fukushima Prefecture. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131216p2a00m0na015000c.html>

SHIRAKAWA, Fukushima -- The Fukushima Prefectural Government failed to check the process of decontamination work at local public apartments here, possibly exposing children to radiation from contaminated waste left at parks in the area, it has been learned.

A Shirakawa resident in her 70s called the Fukushima government in the middle of November when she saw children playing on a pile of bags, in which contaminated waste was stored, at a park in a public apartment complex. According to her, the prefectural government did not take any action about the matter.

The decontamination of radioactive materials at this public complex began in October this year. From the beginning of November, bags of contaminated soil started to pile up at the children's park in the area.

Since the Fukushima government has left the storage processes of contaminated waste to contractors without checking, these bags were left unmanaged at parks. Children were even seen playing tag around them.

When a Mainichi reporter put a dosimeter near bags that were placed close to a street, the device showed radiation levels of 2.23 microsieverts per hour, 10 times more than national limits. The amount of radiation exposure dropped to 0.23 of a microsievert within several meters of the bags.

The Mainichi went to see four other public apartment complexes in the city. At an apartment where storage of radioactive waste began this month, there were two junior high school students talking right next to a pile of waste bags. They said they didn't know about the danger of the bags.

While iron gates surrounding parks have been built at two other apartment complexes, waste bags are piled up there leaving no other room. Radiation levels outside the gates measured one microsievert per hour. At another apartment, radioactive contaminated waste bags were placed close to playground equipment.

These public apartment complexes have many families with small children and most of these families do not own dosimeters. Letters sent by the prefectural government to the residents living in the apartments did not mention anything about the danger of the waste bags or safety measures.

"I understand that contaminated waste needs to be stored, but I want the prefectural government to take as many safety measures as possible," a father of 2 and 3 year olds at one apartment commented.

The Fukushima government has set up metal fences around the storage bags at an apartment where the hourly radiation level topped two microsieverts. This reporter's dosimeter, meanwhile, continued to show levels as high as 0.7 of a microsievert per hour at some complexes.

A senior official with the prefectural government explained that most of the contaminated waste has been buried underground, adding that those storage bags on the ground are a temporary measure and local governments should soon be completing provisional storage facilities.

However, a local official said the completion of such facilities is likely to be carried over to the next fiscal year, meaning those bags of contaminated waste will stay at the parks.

Shoddy management of radioactive soil uncovered at five locations in Fukushima Pref.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131216p2a00m0na016000c.html>

SHIRAKAWA, Fukushima -- The prefectural government has been sloppily managing radioactive soil in at least five locations, leaving bags containing such soil on the ground without shielding radiation, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

Children could have easily approached the soil in some of the locations, and radiation levels were around 10 times the national safety standard at their highest readings. The prefectural government failed to fully follow the rules of a special measures law for management of radioactive waste, leaving the management of the waste storage locations to private businesses. As such, the prefectural government may have violated the special measures law.

The law requires local governments to safely manage radioactive soil and offers management guidelines. It requires that radiation levels on the borders of storage areas be kept at or below one millisievert per year, or 0.23 microsieverts per hour.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans decontamination work at 78 prefecturally-managed apartment properties. So far, work has been completed or is underway at 21 such areas. However, when the Mainichi Shimbun investigated five of these locations in the city of Shirakawa following a tip from a resident, it found bags of radioactive soil left above ground in children's playgrounds and maximum radiation levels of around one to over two microsieverts per hour.

According to an official at the prefecture's construction office, businesses that were commissioned to perform the decontamination work were asked to conform to the law's safety guidelines, but the prefectural official "only gave the guidelines a brief look."

The company employee who oversaw the decontamination work offered only vague comments, saying, "We may have been lax in our understanding (of the safety guidelines.)"

Meanwhile, an official of the prefecture's construction and housing department said, "We didn't know how the radioactive soil was actually being managed."

According to the prefectural government, radioactive waste such as contaminated soil generated by decontamination work should be kept at temporary locations created by local governments until the completion of mid-term storage facilities, but construction of those facilities is not proceeding smoothly, so contaminated waste is being buried or stored above ground at children's playgrounds at prefecturally-managed apartment complexes. Based on the Mainichi Shimbun's warning, the prefecture installed metal fences around storage sites with over two microsieverts of radiation per hour and issued instructions to local government organs to follow safety guidelines for the storage of such waste.

Post-evacuation death toll higher than that of tsunami

December 17, 2013

Fukushima nuclear evacuation-related deaths surpass prefecture's quake, tsunami toll

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131217p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The number of Fukushima Prefecture residents who have died in connection with prolonged evacuation from areas hit by the prefecture's nuclear disaster stood at 1,605 as of Nov. 30, topping the 1,603 deaths in the prefecture caused directly by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, prefectural government data has shown.

The figure far exceeds the 919 indirect deaths from the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. As officials are still collating data, the number is expected to rise further, bringing the harsh circumstances faced by nuclear disaster evacuees into sharp focus.

In Miyagi Prefecture, 878 indirect deaths from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami had been reported as of the end of November, compared with 428 in Iwate Prefecture. In Fukushima Prefecture, the

corresponding figure stood at 761 as of March 2012, and topped 1,000 in August the same year, and 1,500 in August this year.

The deaths include people who were unable to receive appropriate medical care in the confusion after the disaster, causing their health to deteriorate or resulting in them developing new illnesses, as well as people who became mentally unwell and committed suicide.

There are no clear standards for defining disaster-related deaths, which are connected with evacuation -- unprecedented for Fukushima Prefecture residents in terms of distance from their homes, length of evacuation, and the sheer number of evacuated areas.

An official from the Tomioka town government in the prefecture indicated that defining such deaths was becoming harder the longer the situation continued.

"We're seeing more and more diversification, and it's getting more complicated," the official said.

Each case is traced closely from the time the person evacuated to the time of their death, and in some cases, it takes some time for their deaths to be recognized as disaster-related fatalities. Meanwhile, new applications for recognition continue to appear.

Kunihiro Fukutome, a researcher at Tohoku Institute of Technology, commented, "In Fukushima Prefecture, where evacuation is drawn out, damage from the disaster is on a different scale from what we've seen in the past. The causes of death are believed to be widespread, and it's not simply a case of being able to save people's lives by preventing specific illnesses or injuries. It's necessary to improve people's current living environment."

Fukushima resident laments mother's death as life as nuclear evacuee goes on

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131217p2a00m0na017000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- In April last year Kimio Moroboshi, an evacuee from the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma who was forced from his home due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, lost his 86-year-old mother Kiyo.

Moroboshi had operated a textile factory together with his mother, and her death, which came after a lonely time caring for her, left him empty. In April this year he applied to local authorities to have her death recognized as being related to the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, and his claim was accepted in September.

The nuclear disaster took away everything that Moroboshi had. Each morning at 7:30 a.m., Moroboshi's mother would start up the machinery at the small factory facing their home. However, evacuation orders issued following the outbreak of the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant meant they had to abandon their home and factory. They stayed with relatives in the city of Soma, about 16 kilometers away, for roughly two weeks. Moroboshi then moved to other locations in Aomori and Fukushima prefectures, with his mother silently following him.

In November 2011, they moved into a temporary housing unit in Minamisoma, where Kiyo lost movement in her arms and legs. Her lips remained pursed, and she didn't respond when called. She couldn't even sit without Moroboshi holding her. In the turmoil after disasters, the municipal government was unable to spare any care workers, so Moroboshi continued to look after his mother himself.

At the end of March 2012, Kiyo collapsed. Moroboshi wanted her hospitalized, but medical workers turned her away, citing staff shortages. Later, she started coughing, and during the course of her visits to the hospital, it emerged that she had contracted pneumonia and it was too late to save her. She died on April 6 that year.

The last words Moroboshi can remember his mother saying are "Isn't the meal ready yet?" back at the end of 2011. He was tired at the time and the question irritated him, but now those words bring back memories.

"She should have asked me to do more, even if it was impossible. But I wasn't able to grant any of her wishes," Moroboshi laments.

After Moroboshi's mother died, the hypertension that he had developed while living as an evacuee got worse. He was kept busy seeking treatment and compensation from TEPCO, and it was not until April this year that he sought to have his mother's death recognized as being related to the disasters. The Minamisoma Municipal Government asked for follow-up information, including a detailed account of his mother's activities. Using memos, he dug up memories from the past year, and in September this year, he received the recognition he had been seeking.

He remains filled with regrets. If only his mother had been receiving care ... if only she could have been hospitalized ... Yet he doesn't harbor resentment against the city or the hospital.

"Everyone was hit by the disasters and desperate," he says. But he adds, "If only the nuclear disaster hadn't occurred, none of this would have happened."

December 17, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

First mandarin harvest

December 17, 2013

Fukushima residents enjoy mandarin harvest

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131218_07.html

Residents of a town in Fukushima Prefecture were able to harvest mandarin oranges on Tuesday for the first time since the 2011 nuclear accident.

About 50 people gathered on a hill in the town of Hirono where some 150 mandarin trees are planted.

Before the accident at the nearby nuclear plant, the town gave mandarin saplings to residents. They enjoyed picking the fruit around this time each year.

After the accident all residents had to evacuate from the town. They were allowed to return home in March last year. But only about 1,300 people, or one-quarter of the population, have come back.

The residents could not harvest oranges for the past 2 years because radiation levels were higher than a government-set safety limit.

Last month, town officials checked this season's oranges and found the levels are below the limit.

A woman said she used to make mandarin orange jam, and is glad she can do so again.

A town official says **the harvesting is a symbol of the local life**. He said he hopes resumption will encourage more people to return to the town.

New measures for nuclear evacuees

December 18, 2013

New measures for nuclear victims' compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131218_38.html

The government will wrap up new measures for victims of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi plant nuclear disaster. These will include new compensation for residents forced to evacuate and unable to return due to radioactive contamination.

Support for the victims who want to return to their homes and can do so will be expanded.

But many evacuees cannot return to their homes and need to settle somewhere else due to the contamination.

They are now receiving compensation for property value lost.

The new measures will provide additional financial support for them to buy homes in new areas.

The measures suggest that compensation for mental distress from the disaster may be available after 2017.

These steps will continue to be financed by the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, with contributions from other nuclear plant operators.

In the mid- and long-term, proceeds from the sale of TEPCO shares held by the state-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund will be used for decontamination work and to deal with other problems caused by the disaster.

An outline of the measures will be compiled on Friday.

No local consent without a plan for final disposal

December 17, 2013

Editorial: Gov't must offer convincing rationale for interim storage facilities in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131217p2a00m0na011000c.html>

The government has officially requested approval from the Fukushima Prefectural Government and three local municipalities to host interim storage facilities for radioactive waste generated through decontamination work following the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Local governments and residents who now face the prospect of having interim storage facilities built in their communities in addition to the effects of the disaster itself are in a tortuous position. **Without storage facilities, neither decontamination nor reconstruction can proceed.**

The government must make the effort to thoroughly explain its plans for compensation and reconstruction assistance measures, and obtain consent for construction of storage facilities while guaranteeing the safety of the facilities.

Bags filled with soil contaminated with radiation have been left out in the open on privately owned land and temporary storage yards across Fukushima Prefecture because of a lack of interim storage facilities.

According to government plans, the interim storage facilities would be located on a total area of 19 square kilometers -- 11 square kilometers and five square kilometers in the towns of Okuma and Futaba, respectively, which surround the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant; and three square kilometers in the town of Naraha, adjacent to the Fukushima No. 2 Nuclear Power Plant -- that the government hopes to acquire, and have a total capacity of up to 28 million cubic meters.

Each town would house facilities to store contaminated soil, volume reduction systems and buffer zones. The construction of the facilities would cost approximately 1 trillion yen in total, and the government is aiming to begin installation in January 2015. The government has also requested approval from the town of Tomioka to use an existing disposal site.

Local municipalities are wavering, because despite a Cabinet resolution to dispose of the contaminated soil at a final disposal site outside Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years, they fear the interim storage facilities will wind up becoming final disposal sites. Even if interim storage lasts for only 30 years as promised, residents living in the proposed construction areas will be forced to give up returning to their homes.

The government says it intends to write its vow for final disposal outside the prefecture into law, but there are no prospects for securing a final disposal site. **Local residents' concerns will not be dispelled unless the government comes up with a specific plan for securing a final disposal site.**

The majority of Futaba and Okuma have been classified as difficult-to-return zones, while Naraha is an area preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders. This has some Naraha residents asking why an interim storage facility should be built in a community where people will likely be able to return.

As a total of at least 2,000 different people are said to own the land the government hopes to buy in Okuma, Futaba and Naraha, sale negotiations will not be easy. The government must provide compensation sufficient for residents to rebuild their lives in their new communities, and this runs the risk of cutting a chasm through residents based on interim storage facility candidacy and the provision of government compensation payments. It is a reminder that the repercussions of the nuclear disaster are far-reaching.

The government must demonstrate rationally why these three municipalities were selected, and hammer out a recovery-assistance plan that takes into consideration a wide range of input from residents.

Mass volumes of contaminated soil will be transported to storage facilities by trucks. Building dedicated roadways and otherwise readying transportation networks for traffic jams and accidents is another challenge that must be overcome.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato said the national government's request brought the issue to the "starting line." The prefectural government's ability for consensus-building will be put to the test.

Compensation for returnees increased

December 19, 2013

Compensation to be raised for returning Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312190046>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

The government is planning to raise its level of compensation to evacuees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident if they return home soon after evacuation orders are lifted, sources said Dec. 18.

The plan was included in guidelines compiled ahead of the lifting of evacuation orders planned for next spring and later.

The guidelines will be officially adopted on Dec. 20 by the government's headquarters to deal with the nuclear accident. After that, they will be approved by the Cabinet.

According to the guidelines, the increased compensation is being offered because early returnees will face a variety of troubles in their daily lives. The government is also planning to provide returnees with dosimeters so they can regularly check their exposure to radiation. The plan stipulates that returnees can safely be exposed to 1 millisievert or less of radiation annually above what exists in the natural environment.

The guidelines also say the government will offer additional compensation to returnees if they decide to rebuild their homes.

The plan also stipulates that compensation to evacuees for mental suffering will be abolished a year after the evacuation orders are lifted.

In areas where the evacuation orders will be lifted, the government will accelerate decontamination work simultaneously with the reconstruction of infrastructure.

With regard to evacuees who will be unable to return for a prolonged period, the government will also provide compensation to those who will buy homes elsewhere.

It will also study mid- and long-term assessments for areas where residents cannot return.

In a supplementary budget for the current fiscal year, which ends in March 2014, the government introduced new grants for municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture to accelerate recovery. The

municipalities can use the grants flexibly, depending on their circumstances. The government will maintain the grants for next fiscal year.

Abe wants to speed up Fukushima recovery

December 20, 2013

Gov't to boost support to spur early return of Fukushima evacuees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131220p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The government has decided to expand support for Fukushima Prefecture evacuees to encourage their early return to areas near the damaged Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, it has been learned.

The new plan was drawn up by the government's nuclear disaster response headquarters led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It comes ahead of the expected lifting of evacuation orders for some areas in spring.

"Our mission is to have the more than 100,000 people who are forced to live as evacuees rebuild their lives as soon as possible," Abe told a meeting of the headquarters.

The plan includes monetary aid for evacuees from areas that are likely to remain off-limits for the foreseeable future, to help them rebuild their lives in other areas. This marks a shift from the government's previous policy of returning all evacuees to their pre-disaster locations.

Around 81,000 evacuees are from areas that are still under evacuation orders. Around 33,000 are from the most lightly contaminated areas where yearly radiation dosages stand below 20 millisieverts, while around 23,000 are from areas hit by mid-level contamination of between 20 and 50 millisieverts per year.

The plan aims to help evacuees from such areas return to their homes in peace of mind when the evacuation orders are lifted. In addition to making Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the owner of the crippled Fukushima plant, pay additional compensation to cover repairs and the rebuilding of damaged homes, the plan would give evacuees who return to their homes early several hundred thousand yen each to compensate for the lack of adequate public infrastructure. The plan would also use money from a fund set up under a supplementary government budget to speed up Fukushima Prefecture's recovery, to help restart agriculture and commercial facilities in the area. To reduce residents' anxiety about their health, radiation exposure would be monitored on an individual basis.

Assistance for residents to live in places other than their original homes will mainly be intended for the approximately 25,000 people from areas where radiation dosages top 50 millisieverts per year, for which evacuation orders are expected to remain in place for many years. TEPCO will be made to compensate these residents for the cost of buying new property and constructing homes, as well as for emotional damage.

Also as part of this assistance, the government plans to set up facilities to help maintain pre-disaster community ties, and it plans to create a way for the government and evacuees to work together to make decisions on radiation decontamination and other community-restoration measures. Although generally intended for evacuees who lived in the most heavily contaminated areas, these support measures may be extended to other evacuees depending on their circumstances.

A government committee in charge of handling disputes over nuclear disaster-related compensation payments is expected to decide on the amounts of compensation on Dec. 26. The government put the plan together based on suggestions presented by the Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner New Komeito in November.

Govt. to boost assistance for Fukushima residents

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131220_26.html

The Japanese government has compiled new guidelines for financial assistance for people affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Cabinet ministers compiled the guidelines at a meeting of the nuclear disaster taskforce on Friday.

Abe said the reconstruction work in Fukushima is essential for Japan's revitalization. He urged the ministers to work with local officials to help rebuild the residents' lives and revitalize the area's economy.

The guidelines include separate measures for residents who plan to return home as their evacuation orders have been lifted and those who can't because the orders are still in effect.

For residents who plan to return home, the government plans to increase the compensation payments for rebuilding or renovating their houses.

But the government says compensation for mental distress will be limited to a period of one year after the evacuation orders are lifted.

For those who can't return home, the government plans to provide additional financial support to purchase homes in new locations. They will receive lump sum compensation for mental distress that they are expected to suffer 6 years after the nuclear accident.

The government also plans to raise the upper limit of its interest-free loans to Tokyo Electric Power Company from the current 5 trillion yen to 9 trillion yen, or about 87 billion dollars.

The measures will continue to be financed by TEPCO and contributions from other nuclear plant operators.

The government also plans to finance the decontamination work with the proceeds from the sale of TEPCO stocks held by the state-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund.

Abe tries to speed up Fukushima recovery

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/20/national/abe-tries-to-speed-up-fukushima-recovery/#.UrRHZCfij9k>

The Abe administration on Friday aired new policies for speeding up recovery from the 2011 Fukushima disaster that include more financial aid for Tokyo Electric Power Co. and more support for nuclear evacuees seeking new lives elsewhere.

Under a new set of guidelines decided Friday, Tepco is to be relieved of paying part of the radiation cleanup costs outside the Fukushima No. 1 power plant but gain additional interest-free loans from a government-backed fund to ensure it can still distribute compensation and shoulder decontamination costs.

The administration drew up the guidelines based on a proposal drafted by the ruling coalition in November. Nearly three years have passed since the crisis began, but 140,000 Fukushima Prefecture residents are still living as nuclear refugees.

“Under existing policies, we have found that there are difficulties for people and local governments in taking new steps toward their future . . . so the state will play a proactive role to accelerate the revitalization of Fukushima,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at a meeting of the nuclear disaster task force.

Hoping to lift evacuation orders in areas around the crippled plant next spring, the government said it will support people who plan to promptly return to their homes by offering extra compensation.

But at the same time, it gave up on its goal of getting everyone to return to their homes, pointing to the need to prepare support for those who opt to abandon their tainted homes.

Evacuation orders will be lifted in areas where it is certain that the estimated annual radiation exposure will be 20 millisieverts or lower, and once electricity and other services have been restored and decontamination completed.

Fearing that a lack of funds could affect the recovery, the government also reviewed the financial burdens of Tepco in relation to the compensation payments and off-site decontamination activities.

Tepco will remain responsible for compensating people and companies. It will also be asked to shoulder the costs of off-site decontamination completed or currently planned.

But to make sure that Tepco will not face funding difficulties, the government will lift the ceiling on interest-free loans it is allowed to receive from the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund to ¥9 trillion from the present ¥5 trillion.

Tepco will have to repay the loans. However, as for decontamination costs, estimated at ¥2.5 trillion so far, the fund will seek to cover them by selling its Tepco shares.

The fund acquired a majority stake in Tepco in return for a ¥1 trillion capital injection last year to keep the utility from folding.

The close to ¥1.1 trillion that will be needed to build and manage interim storage facilities for radioactive waste collected by decontamination work will be footed by taxpayers.

Last Fukushima evacuation center to close

December 18, 2013

Fukushima residents to vacate last evacuation center by year-end

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131218p2g00m0dm081000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The occupants of the last evacuation center housing people displaced by the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis will leave it by the end of this year, the mayor of an evacuated town in Fukushima Prefecture said Wednesday.

"We will step forward to rebuild their lives," Shiro Izawa, mayor of Futaba, which hosts the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex, told reporters after a town assembly meeting.

As of Tuesday, seven evacuees from Futaba were living at the center in Kazo, Saitama Prefecture, which was once used as a high school building, and all of them, aged 60 or older, have found new accommodation, according to the municipal government.

Izawa said, "We will continue providing administrative services to the evacuees so they will not feel inconvenienced."

The entire population of Futaba was evacuated in the wake of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant on March 11, 2011, and the headquarters of the municipal government was transferred to the former school building before being removed to Iwaki, Fukushima, in June this year.

The evacuation center will officially shut down early next year following maintenance work, Izawa said.

TEPCO will expand its Fukushima office to help people

December 22, 2013

TEPCO to beef up Fukushima Headquarters

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131222_13.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company says it will beef up its Fukushima headquarters in a bid to help residents return to their homes.

TEPCO will finish compiling its 10-year business plan on Friday.

They are planning to move the headquarters within 5 years to a new location from its current location at the national soccer team's training compound. They have been using the facility since January.

The new headquarters will be set up in a municipality in a zone currently designated as an evacuation area.

The training compound will be returned to the Japan Football Association.

TEPCO also plans to add hundreds of workers to its current labor force, to total 2,000.

The increased personnel will handle operations, including the cleaning up of homes and offices for all returning residents. They are also expected to monitor radiation levels at these locations.

The utility said it is hoping the new office will help revitalize the regional economy by attracting new retail stores and gas stations, and help residents return home.

TEPCO is planning to spend the next 10 years rebuilding deteriorating hydroelectric power plants in the prefecture. The utility will also build the newest type of thermal power generation plants there.

Difficult to prove connection between deaths and disasters

December 24, 2013

Fukushima local gov'ts struggle to establish causal links between deaths and disasters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131224p2a00m0na014000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Local governments here are struggling to establish causal connections between deaths of residents and disasters triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, as the number of residents who died in connection with prolonged evacuation from nuclear-disaster zones reached 1,605. The figure has surpassed the 1,603 direct deaths from the earthquake and tsunami.

It is becoming more and more difficult to prove causal connections between deaths and the quake disasters as time goes by. As bereaved families continue to apply for official recognition of their loved ones' deaths as disaster-related fatalities, the number of deaths associated with the quake disasters is expected to rise. But while local governments in Fukushima Prefecture are calling for unified standards for defining disaster-related deaths, the central government insists that causes of fatalities be determined on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, no solution to the issue is in sight.

"I can't enjoy life no matter what I do," murmured a 71-year-old man who continues to live by himself in a makeshift housing unit in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. His wife, who had been suffering from stomach cancer, passed away at the age of 69 on April 2, 2011, slightly more than three weeks after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Before her death, the couple took shelter at a gymnasium in the city. They then took a bus for more than 10 hours to get to Sanjo, Niigata Prefecture. His wife became frail and passed away after arriving in the city. A medical certificate suggested that his wife had lost her physical strength because she could not receive proper medical treatment. So, her death was recognized as a disaster-related fatality. The man said about life without his wife, "It is painful because there is no one I can talk with even about little things."

There were 919 deaths that were recognized as fatalities related to the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake. In the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, 428 deaths were attributed as disaster-related fatalities in Iwate Prefecture, while there were 878 of such deaths in Miyagi Prefecture, both as of Nov. 30 this year. Fukushima Prefecture stood out with 1,605 such fatalities. In Fukushima Prefecture, 309 deaths have been rejected as disaster-related fatalities, 76 deaths are currently under review and more applications have been filed.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government's welfare division, problems faced by the elderly such as stress from evacuation from areas hit by the nuclear disaster with no end in sight and isolation as a result of separation from families are becoming serious.

In collaboration with municipal governments, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is making visits to temporary housing and rental housing units for evacuees, and officials with knowledge of medicine regularly visit the elderly and pregnant women. If residents make worrisome replies to health surveys for prefectural residents that suggest the need for mental care, prefectural government officials call them to check on their health status.

Life support counselors hired by social welfare councils continue to visit elderly people who tend to shut themselves in. But one life support counselor handles 100 to 200 residents, and there are cases in which counselors are exclusively exposed to complaints about the status quo from residents. The situation is such that even aid workers need to receive care.

Kozo Ueda, head of Kobe-kyodo Hospital who conducted medical support activities during the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake, said, "Fukushima is special. They are faced with the unacceptable problem of the nuclear accident." He went on to say, "As long as there are no prospects of their livelihoods being restored, the fundamental problem will never be resolved."

If a death is recognized as a disaster-related fatality, the bereaved family can receive up to 5 million yen in condolence money, but the problem is there are no clear standards for defining such deaths. The Mainichi Shimbun conducted a questionnaire survey of 23 municipalities which had conducted screening for disaster-related fatalities. Twenty municipalities and local assemblies responded to the survey. The survey found that seven municipalities called for unified standards for defining disaster-associated deaths, saying, "It is difficult to judge because of a lack of unified standards."

As a reference for standards, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry showed each municipal government in the prefecture an example from the 2004 Chuetsu Earthquake in Niigata Prefecture in which a death after more than one month from the disaster was considered less likely to be caused by the disaster. But the Namie Municipal Government said, "The distance, long hours, multiple places for evacuation (after the nuclear crisis) as well as stress are not taken into consideration." Each municipality is in fact screening applications through a panel of experts.

Yasuo Sato, father of Masaharu Sato, 60, evacuated from Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, which is within a radius of 20 kilometers from the troubled nuclear power station. But his dementia worsened in the middle of his evacuation. He could not understand why he could not return home and his stress built up. He died at the age of 86 about three months after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. The Minamisoma Municipal Government recognized his death as disaster-related while taking into consideration his evacuation process. But even his family does not know the clear cause of his death.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government holds a meeting of local government officials in charge three times a year and came to share information on cases that are difficult to judge. But that is not enough. The Cabinet Office takes the position of leaving the matter to municipal governments, saying, "Conditions of disasters cannot be assumed, and if standards are worked out, it will be difficult to deal with them flexibly."

Yukihito Oguchi, a lawyer who is a member of a screening panel in Yamada, Iwate Prefecture, said, "The screening processes have not been made public. Results of screenings by each screening panel must be shared, and the central government and prefectures should consolidate such information responsibly and release it."

December 24, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Overnight stays allowed in evacuation zones

December 24, 2013

Fukushima evacuees begin temporary visits

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131225_01.html

Some residents who evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear accident are visiting their homes for the New Year holidays.

People are not usually allowed to stay overnight at houses in evacuation zones near the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

But the government says residents of areas with relatively low radiation levels can stay at their homes until January 7th.

Yoshiyuki Sugi and his wife drove to their house in the Odaka district of Minamisoma City from their temporary accommodation on Tuesday.

They return home once a week during the day, but this is the first time they will spend the night at their house since the nuclear accident in March 2011.

Sugi says he is happy to come back but he is worried about radiation as the decontamination work around his home has not been completed.

Government officials say about 1,700 people from 556 households in 6 municipalities have sought permission to make temporary visits during the New Year period.

Rice cultivation expanded

December 24, 2013

Fukushima rice-cultivation area to be expanded

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131224_28.html

Japan's government plans to permit rice cultivation on an experimental basis in paddies in Fukushima Prefecture next year, 3 years after the nuclear disaster.

This year, the agriculture ministry banned rice planting in 5,300 hectares of rice paddies within evacuation zones, citing the risk that the crops could contain levels of radioactive material over the government limit.

But following the government's review of the evacuation zones in August, the ministry decided to allow experimental rice planting in 3,900 hectares.

The purpose of experimental rice cultivation is to verify the level of radioactive material in the rice produced.

The ministry says that if farmers want to resume full-scale rice cultivation, their entire crop will be checked by the prefecture and municipalities. If the level of radioactive material is within the limit, the rice can be put on sale.

The ministry says its plan to expand crop acreage depend on the situation in each area.
Dec. 24, 2013 - Updated 10:21 UTC

Salmon hatcheries within evacuation zone

December 27, 2013

Fukushima salmon industry in peril with hatcheries stuck in evacuation zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312270008>

By HIROKI ITO/ Staff Writer

NARAHA, Fukushima Prefecture--Hideo Matsumoto stares at the surface of the Kidogawa river here, a quiet, tree-lined waterway where salmon have been caught for centuries. A forlorn expression forms on his face.

"I want fishing to make a full comeback soon," says Matsumoto, the 65-year-old head of the Kidogawa river fishermen's cooperative. "If we don't resume fishing, the river won't have many salmon coming up it."

Unfortunately, Japan's greatest salmon runs could see a huge drop in returning fish in two or three years' time, putting the entire salmon business in Fukushima Prefecture in jeopardy.

Fishermen have been unable to hatch eggs or release young fish on five rivers in the prefecture because the hatcheries are located within the evacuation zone around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In normal times in the town of Naraha, located along the Kidogawa river, salmon are caught in autumn and then their eggs are artificially inseminated. The hatchlings are released the following spring, and return to the river, where they were born, four or five years later to spawn.

But the majority of hatchlings released into the Kidogawa river immediately before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 are believed to have been wiped out by the tsunami.

Since then, no salmon have been hatched or released because the disaster destroyed hatcheries, which cannot be repaired because they lie within the evacuation zone of the nuclear accident.

If the situation remains unchanged past 2014 or 2015, when the salmon released in 2010 are expected to return, then the number of fish making the run could plummet.

On Nov. 17, 11 members of the fishermen's cooperative caught about 100 fish using the "combination net fishing" technique, in which they sent a net flowing downstream to meet another net that was set in position.

Fishing in the evacuation zone is generally prohibited by the Fukushima prefectural government. This excursion was a test to study the effects of radioactive substances. Although the levels have never exceeded detection limits since these test catches began last year, it is still not known when fishing can resume.

According to the cooperative, salmon have been caught in the Kidogawa river since the Edo Period (1603-1867). In 1911, the year the cooperative was formed, fishermen began breeding and releasing young salmon.

In 1983, hatcheries were built that could breed more than 10 million fish. And in 1995, more salmon were caught in the Kidogawa river than anywhere else on Japan's main island of Honshu.

The Kidogawa river fishermen's cooperative had supplied eggs to other cooperatives in the prefecture. A source at a prefectural fisheries experiment station said prolonged delays in reopening the hatcheries "could have an incalculable effect on future salmon fishing in Fukushima Prefecture."

Decontamination work in Naraha is expected to wrap up in spring 2014, followed by the lifting of the evacuation order in the town. But even if the hatcheries are repaired after that time, it will be too late for the salmon that arrive in autumn 2014.

The cooperative aims to resume fishing in autumn 2015, but it is still not known if the evacuation order will be lifted next spring.

Adding to Matsumoto's sense of crisis is the average age of the cooperative's members: 66. "At this rate, we won't be able to pass on our techniques and it'll mean the end of salmon fishing's long history in the area," he says.

Before the disaster, Fukushima Prefecture was consistently in the pack for third-largest catch of salmon behind Hokkaido and Iwate Prefecture. Fukushima Prefecture was also used to ship salmon roe and other processed goods.

But due to the evacuation zone encompassing hatcheries on five of the prefecture's 10 rivers, the 2012 catch was around 58,000 fish, less than half the amount before the disaster.

The central government is using a subsidy program and other measures to revive the industry.

Salmon catches have recovered to nearly 90 percent of pre-quake levels in Miyagi Prefecture and to more than 60 percent in Iwate Prefecture, respectively. The two prefectures were also heavily hit by the 2011 disaster.

The delay in Fukushima Prefecture stands out.

The Kidogawa river has relatively low amounts of radiation and is expected to be the first among the five rivers in the evacuation zone where fishing will resume.

More compensation money for loss of hometowns

December 27, 2013

TEPCO to pay evacuees additional 7 million yen for 'loss of hometowns'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312270055>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government will order Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay an additional 7 million yen (\$66,700) in compensation for each person who will likely be unable to return home over their lifetimes due to the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The science and technology ministry's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation on Dec. 26 decided to order TEPCO, operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, to compensate nuclear disaster victims for the loss of their hometowns.

The committee will also order TEPCO to help the victims purchase new homes.

The latest decision came as the government is shifting emphasis from helping people return to their hometowns in Fukushima Prefecture to supporting evacuees rebuild their lives elsewhere.

The newest compensation will be paid to about 25,000 people from "difficult-to-return zones" where radiation levels are more than 50 millisieverts per year. It remains unclear when those residents will be allowed to return home, if ever.

Each of the 25,000 evacuees already receives 100,000 yen per month in compensation. The additional 7 million yen will raise the total amount of compensation to 14.5 million yen per person.

TEPCO will also be required to pay additional money to support evacuees who will not be able to return to their hometowns to help them buy land and houses elsewhere.

According to estimates by the office of the ministry's committee, a family of four from the difficult-to-return zones will be eligible to receive 106.75 million yen overall, including the compensation announced on Dec. 26.

It is also estimated that a family of four from zones where residences are restricted--where radiation levels are between 20 and 50 millisieverts per year--will receive 71.97 million yen. A family of the same number from areas where preparations will be made to lift the current evacuation order, which cover regions with an annual radiation level of 20 millisieverts or lower, will be able to receive 56.81 million yen, according to the estimates.

A 35-year-old unemployed man, who was forced to evacuate with his wife and three children from their home in a difficult-to-return zone in Okuma, recently purchased a new house in Koriyama in the prefecture far from the stricken plant, using his monthly compensation from TEPCO.

The man said he felt relieved to hear that they will be able to receive additional compensation that will total several tens of millions of yen.

“Because vast amounts of money have been spent for decontamination work in areas where residents will likely be unable to return home, I have been concerned that the amount of compensation we will receive may be reduced,” he said.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi, Kunio Ozawa, Yukiko Seino and Noriyoshi Otsuki.)

End of tax grace periods

December 29, 2013

Tax office to end grace periods in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131229_01.html

Japan's tax authorities will end next year grace periods granted to residents affected by the nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture in 2011.

The National Tax Administration Agency currently extends deadlines for final tax returns and payments of national taxes in 12 municipalities around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

But agency officials now plan to end this special measure. They say long grace periods mean that people have to pay a comparatively huge amount after it ends. They also cite a growing number of people who are paying taxes without applying for a delay.

The agency is expected to end the grace periods in late March. But it plans to allow people whose homes are in areas designated as unsuitable for living due to high radiation levels, or those who have other special reasons, to further postpone payments.

Agency officials say they will make sure the new step does not impose burdens on taxpayers in the areas.

Home for New Year's celebration

December 29, 2013

Evacuees in Fukushima return home to celebrate New Year's

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312290012>

By HIROKI ITO/ Staff Writer

NARAHA, Fukushima Prefecture--It is a bittersweet return home to Naraha for the New Year's holidays for Haruo Suzuki, 75, and his wife, Michiko, 74, evacuees for the past three years after the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Evacuees from the town have been allowed to return from Dec. 28 until Jan. 4 on a "special" basis and spend New Year's in their homes for the first time in three years.

"I miss our two grandchildren and feel lonely," Michiko says, sitting at the dining table where the entire family of six used to enjoy meals together before going their separate ways following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Naraha, within 20 kilometers from the plant, is in an area designated as a "zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order."

The Suzukis returned to their home from Hirono, a town adjacent to Naraha, where they have been evacuated.

"My own home is the best place to relax," Haruo says.

The elderly couple used to live in the house together with their daughter, her husband and two children. But the accident forced the young couple to evacuate to Oita Prefecture on Kyushu island with their two children. They feared that the radiation from the accident could adversely affect the health of the two elementary school pupils.

Among the approximately 7,500 residents in Naraha, 428 people of 168 households applied for the special return program. The Naraha municipal government plans to make a final decision next spring on when to allow residents to return to the town on a permanent basis.

Fukushima's abandoned pets

December 30, 2013

In Fukushima, abandoned pets are multiplying

With authorities' hands tied, NPO takes up challenge of spaying, neutering cats and dogs

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/12/30/issues/in-fukushima-abandoned-pets-are-multiplying/#.UsHaFbT8nIU>

by Louise George Kittaka
Special To The Japan Times

It isn't only humans that are suffering in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima. Scores of feral animals are eking out a precarious existence in the surrounding areas, including cats and dogs that were once somebody's pets.

Left behind in the chaotic exodus, many pets are still unable to join their owners in temporary housing, while others have simply been abandoned. The luckiest animals get occasional visits if and when their owners can find the time and the means to visit their former homes, but most rely on the goodwill of volunteers or have to fend for themselves. Those that are hardy enough to survive the harsh Tohoku winters do what comes naturally and breed, resulting in a sharp rise in feral cats and dogs in the region.

More often than not, the media chooses to focus on feel-good stories about the efforts of volunteer groups to reunite pets with their owners, or to secure loving new homes. However, Hiro Yamasaki of the Animal Rescue System Fund (ARSF) wants the public to realize that there are other sides of the story to consider, too.

Since setting up the Fukushima Spay Clinic in 2012 in the city of Shirakawa, about 100 km southwest of the nuclear plant, Yamasaki and his team of volunteers have spayed and neutered 1,448 animals economically and safely, based on proven methods introduced from the United States.

"Sterilization is the most practical and humane way to curb the growing population of feral animals, and research backs this up," he says. "Unfortunately, our clinic is the only one providing this kind of service. The local vets and bureaucrats have not responded adequately to the situation. Something had to be done."

Yamasaki knows what he is talking about. The Kobe native first became involved with animal rescue after the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. As in Fukushima, many pets were left behind because their owners were not permitted to bring animals to the evacuation centers. Although there were initially plenty of willing volunteers on hand to help, they needed someone to coordinate and streamline all the various efforts, and Yamasaki found himself stepping into that role. He went on to study NPO management in the United States and Canada for 10 years.

"I then realized a bigger problem existed. In the years after the earthquake, the number of feral kittens in Kobe increased. I did some quite detailed statistical research and worked out how many animals various areas could support, and the optimum rate of spaying and neutering — 70 percent — that was necessary to achieve this."

Yamasaki opened the No More Homeless Animals Clinic in Kobe in 2006. No local vets were willing to be involved, so he called on the services of two sympathetic vets from the Kanto region to perform the operations, and relied on a network of volunteers to trap and bring in the cats.

“In the decade between the Hanshin earthquake and the Kobe clinic opening, the number of kittens being gassed by the city rose,” Yamasaki explains. “However, following our efforts to sterilize the feral cats in the region, the killings dropped year on year between 2006 and 2012. The TNR (trap, neuter, return) model clearly works.”

Still busy with the Kobe clinic, Yamasaki originally had no plans for any kind of long-term relief work in Fukushima.

“Then, after hearing how bleak the situation was from animal-rescue volunteers, I knew there was an urgent need for a spaying clinic up there, too.”

His initial idea was to set up a clinic within an existing shelter run by Fukushima Prefecture and the Fukushima Veterinary Medical Association, and he attempted to interest local vets in the operative methods that had worked so well in Kobe. He soon found himself running up against a brick wall, however, as the local old-boys network closed ranks and any tentative signs of interest were quickly squashed.

“There’s a distinct *inaka seishin* (provincial mentality) in these communities. You can’t rock the boat if you want to fit in. The local government officials and businessmen like things to stay as they are.”

Undeterred, Yamasaki and his supporters went ahead and set up the Fukushima Spay Clinic in rented premises near a shopping mall. In a carefully orchestrated operation, volunteers round up animals in time for the biweekly visits by the clinic’s sole vet, Dr. Fumie Endo, who travels all the way from Shizuoka each time. ARSF had set a target of sterilizing at least 1,000 Fukushima animals in 2013, a figure that was reached in September.

Efforts are focused on feral and abandoned animals, but the clinic also accepts pets for low-cost spaying and neutering. Yamasaki says that the clinic’s location next to a laundromat means it has attracted lots of attention from passersby.

“People bring their clothes to the laundromat because they can’t hang washing outside, due to concerns about radiation. Then they see the clinic and want to know more.”

While Yamasaki is pleased with how well the clinic is functioning, he is disillusioned with the lack of official support.

“When I visited the one government-run shelter in the area in Miharu, it had only pets belonging to evacuees,” he says. “The cats and dogs were simply kept in cages with no attempt at sterilization, and the staff were doing nothing to help the feral animal population around the shelter, even though there was plenty of room.”

Shelter staff told Yamasaki they would not spay or neuter any pets without the owners’ permission. While Kobe had a regulation in place allowing sterilization of animals abandoned for more than a month, there is no such provision in Fukushima. Owners retain their “rights” to the animal even when it is obvious they have no real intention of ever claiming it back.

Susan Roberts, co-founder of the Japan Cat Network, shares Yamasaki’s frustration with the situation. JCN runs two shelters, including one in the city of Inawashiro in Fukushima. She tells the story of one local woman who stepped in to rescue animals but ended up becoming overwhelmed with the sheer numbers.

“She had stayed behind, living at her house, in a dangerously radiated area, specifically to help animals. She was doing much of this work all on her own at the time, going around to homes feeding dogs, cats, chickens,” Roberts explains. “But now she has too many animals, and not enough resources to provide good care.”

Although this woman had the best of intentions, ARSF had to provide veterinary care to some of the cats she brought in for sterilization, since they had become sick due to the crowded and unsanitary conditions at her residence. At one stage, the municipal pound in Koriyama were even calling on her to take in more animals without investigating her situation or providing adequate support.

It isn't as if there has been a lack of financial support for the animals of Fukushima. According to Yamasaki, both overseas donors and the Japanese public have given generously to the official organization charged with disbursing funds to help the animals, but little of the money has yet been used for its intended purpose.

"The organization, based in Tokyo, is called the Dobutsu Kyuen Honbu (Headquarters for the Relief of Animals in Emergencies). It was set up after the Hanshin earthquake with the intention of helping in future emergencies. In reality, it has done nothing of the kind."

In a story that was picked up by the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper in August, Yamasaki says that poor investment decisions have so far led to losses of ¥8.4 million after the purchase of mutual funds in 2006. A massive ¥200 million currently sits in the organization's account with no designated purpose.

Elizabeth Oliver, founder of Animal Refuge Kansai and one of Japan's most respected animal advocates, and Yamasaki sent a joint letter to the Dobutsu Kyuen Honbu requesting an investigation into their financial matters.

"Nothing has been made clear and there are many discrepancies," Oliver says. "We were just told that the person who made the bad investment had since left the organization. I had hoped that lessons learned from the Kobe earthquake would result in better management of animals during future disasters. Disappointingly, that hasn't been the case in Fukushima. I doubt that things will change much."

Dobutsu Kyuen Honbu did not respond to a request for comment from The Japan Times.

While Yamasaki harbors no illusions about any changes in the bureaucracy, he sees definite potential for altering the mindset of regular citizens in regard to animal welfare.

"Traditionally, pet owners in Fukushima don't neuter or spay their animals," he says. "When a female pet has an unwanted litter, it's quite typical to take the newborn babies to the nearest river and drown them."

He sees the Fukushima Spay Clinic as a platform for education in responsible pet ownership, and plans to take part in the Humane Society International's World Spay Day 2014 in February.

"Vets usually charge inflated prices for neutering and spaying. Many people don't have the funds for it and we don't want to force it on them," Yamasaki says. "But, through being open with our activities at the spay clinic, we can show people it's possible to perform the operations at a low cost. Our volunteers are working to change the attitude of the local people — even if we can't change the authorities."

Animal Rescue System Fund: www.animalrescue-sf.org/fukushima_eng/index.html. Japan Cat Network: japancatnetwork.org. ARK: www.arkbark.net. Send all your comments and story ideas to community@japantimes.co.jp.

Guidelines for compensation: a very complex issue

December 30, 2013

Editorial: Gov't compensation for nuclear disaster must respect range of choices

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131230p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The science ministry's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation has drawn up new guidelines on compensation payments for Fukushima Prefecture residents affected by the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

Total compensation for the emotional suffering of residents whose homes are in areas where they are unlikely to be able to return comes out to 14.5 million yen per person, and any remaining amounts will be paid in lump sums.

To those who have bought homes in their new communities at prices exceeding the compensation amounts for their land and homes in the disaster zones, the government will pay an additional set amount based on the difference.

The government on Dec. 20 announced its plan to speed up Fukushima's recovery, revealing that it is backing down from its original plan to eventually return all prefectural residents to their communities of residence at the time of the nuclear disaster's onset.

The lump-sum payments and residential compensation incorporated into the reconciliation committee's guidelines aim to provide financial support to those whose homes are in areas that are still highly contaminated to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

The government must promptly attend to specific measures for a wide-range of issues involving people who have decided to give up on returning to their hometowns, including housing, employment and health care. As for the towns of Okuma and Futaba, where at least 90 percent of the population are from areas that are expected to remain off limits, the central and Fukushima prefectural governments must hold serious deliberations with local communities.

How can the government offer recompense for people who have lost not only their hometowns, but the communities and ties they spent years building? It's a difficult question because we have not confronted anything like this before.

Compensation for emotional suffering comes out to a total of 58 million yen for a family of four. As was suggested during talks by the dispute reconciliation committee, however, much of that money is likely to be allotted to expenses related to evacuation and other living expenses. Many have fallen ill from the stress of evacuation, and it has not been rare for people to go back and forth between two homes, or to move multiple times. The "damage" suffered by people varies widely.

The reconciliation committee's guidelines are, in the end, guidelines. Generally, a settlement between residents and Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) would be held at the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center based on the guidelines. The Center and TEPCO should aim to carefully consider the residents' specific cases, and if need be, provide compensation amounts that exceed those in the guidelines. If the involved parties still fail to reach a settlement, the case must be brought to the courts so that victims can receive compensation appropriate to their circumstances.

Attention must also be paid to those who live outside the off-limits areas as well. The reconciliation committee decided that it would cut off 100,000-yen monthly compensation payments to residents a year after an area's evacuation zone status is lifted. But how will those who continue to live in areas where they've evacuated to, without returning to their homes in Fukushima, continue to live?

The lifting of an evacuation order does not necessarily mean that all the residents who left will return. A yearly cumulative radiation dose of 20 millisieverts is the criteria for lifting the status of a no-go zone, and there's a possibility that many households with children will refuse to return citing such radiation levels as too high.

The government has revealed its plan to offer additional compensation to residents who return early, but the government must institute assistance measures for all victims of the disaster while respecting individual choices, including that of not returning to their Fukushima hometowns.

December 30, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Hasegawa's photos of Iitate to keep record "for posterity"

January 01, 2014

Dairy farmer records changes to his Fukushima village

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201401010030

By MAKI OKUBO/ Senior Staff Writer

DATE, Fukushima Prefecture--Kenichi Hasegawa's home videos and photos do not contain the usual fare. They show cows heading for slaughter, villagers bidding farewell, and men in protective suits roaming the village.

Hasegawa said he bought a single-lens reflex camera and a camcorder immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the accident at the nearby Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

“I have to keep records for the sake of posterity,” said Hasegawa, a 60-year-old dairy farmer.

His home village of Iitate in this northeastern prefecture was once filled with edible wild plants in spring, mushrooms in autumn and wild boar hunts in winter.

But that peaceful life in the mountains came to an abrupt end when the nuclear accident spewed radioactive substances over the village.

Eight members of four generations in Hasegawa’s family once lived together. They are now separated in four households.

Hasegawa lives with his wife in temporary housing in Date, Fukushima Prefecture.

Driven by the will to persevere, Hasegawa has published two books and a photo collection, in addition to a 70-minute documentary film he released in autumn. He has been to various parts of Japan, Germany and South Korea to give about 200 speeches about the plight of the village.

His photos feature scenes of the departure of his 50 dairy cows, some for a slaughterhouse and others for new owners; his empty cow barn; villagers evacuating Iitate; dilapidated farmland; and the radioactive cleanup work that continues to devour huge expenses.

Hasegawa plans to soon publish his second collection of photos, which will document changes in the village and the travails of villagers following the nuclear accident.

Nearly three years after the nuclear disaster started, an increasing number of Iitate villagers are yearning for land to live on and houses to live in. Hasegawa has acute concerns about the policy line of the village government, which sets return as a foregone conclusion.

The farmer says he believes Iitate’s villagers will fall apart unless a temporary, replacement village is built soon.

“I don’t want others to experience what we have undergone,” Hasegawa said in his characteristic, hoarse voice. “It’s enough that we have had to go through it.”

He said his foremost desire was to be able to live with all his family members under a single roof.

Life goes on

January 2, 2014

Fukushima survivors celebrate coming of age

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140102_20.html

Young men and women who fled a village in Fukushima Prefecture in northeastern Japan nearly 3 years ago celebrated their "Coming-of-Age Day" on Thursday.

The former residents of Katsurao have held the ceremony outside the village since they left their homes, which are close to the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

13 new adults held a moment of silence to pay respect to the victims of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and those still considered missing.

Village mayor Masahide Matsumoto encouraged them to be proud of their hometown.

Moemi Watanabe represented the new adults. She said they will never forget Katsurao, where nature is abundant.

She added as adults, they will do everything to contribute to society.

Another woman said she felt a sense of maturity as the ceremony unfolded. She said she wants to be a caregiver who can support disadvantaged people.

The residents traditionally hold the ceremony on January 2nd, when young people return from cities to enjoy New Year's Day with their families.

Japan designates January 13th as "Coming-of-Age Day."

Japanese are legally considered adults when they turn 20.

J-village will be relocated

January 2, 2014

Fukushima soccer training site may reopen in '18

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140102_12.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company plans to advance restoration work at a national soccer training center in Fukushima Prefecture so it can be reopened in 2018. The utility has used the site as a base to clean up its crippled nuclear plant.

Officials say the utility is planning to re-sod and decontaminate the J-Village compound, about 20 kilometers south of the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

About 1 million people used J-Village each year before the March 2011 disaster. It also served as a training camp site of Japan's national soccer team.

After the nuclear accident, the compound was turned into a base for workers trying to contain the crisis. Its grounds are still being used as parking lots and storage space for equipment for clean-up work.

In its 10-year business plan released last month, TEPCO says it will relocate its Fukushima rebuilding headquarters from J-Village to a new location in the prefecture.

The utility has already moved clean-up base functions to a new facility near the plant's main gate.

Officials say the utility hopes to make the compound ready to host training camps of soccer teams from abroad before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

They say the reopening of the facility will appeal the reconstruction of the disaster-hit region to the world.

J-Village is jointly owned by the utility, the Japan Football Association and local governments, among others.

Fukushima students in Paris

January 3, 2014

Students to tell about Fukushima, Tohoku in Paris



http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140103_14.html

High school students from Fukushima and other disaster-hit prefectures in northeastern Japan are busy preparing presentations on their communities that they will deliver in Paris.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, planned the event for August. It's trying to empower the young people who will lead the recovery effort in the region know as Tohoku.

About 100 senior and junior high students from the prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate have been working on how to present the current situation in their hometowns. They also want to promote regional attractions that could help boost the recovery.

The students launched the project in March 2012 and formed 9 teams.

One from Fukushima reported on the experience of the 2011 tsunami and nuclear accident during a rehearsal in late December. Members used pictures depicting death and resurrection to express their feelings.

Those on another team from Fukushima gave a talk on how much they learned about radiation since the accident. They also showed photos promoting tourist attractions in the prefecture.

Haruna Shiraiwa from the city of Iwaki said she will try her best to give accurate information about Fukushima and explain the charm of Japan's northeast.

Faculty from Fukushima University are overseeing the project. Professor Hiroki Miura says he has witnessed many students developing skills in debating and planning. He says he hopes they will brush up the content of their presentations by this summer.

"A disaster that never ends"

January 1, 2013

Fukushima ghost towns struggle to recover amid high radiation levels

Post-tsunami reconstruction and radiation cleanup could take 10 years, but officials say something has been permanently lost

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jan/01/fukushima-ghost-towns-high-radiation-levels-tsunami>

The Guardian, Wednesday 1 January 2014 16.21 GMT



Homes, shops and streets are deserted in the town of Namie, which lies six miles from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Photograph: Damir Sagolj/Reuters

Nearly three years after a major earthquake, tsunami and nuclear radiation leak devastated coastal and inland areas of Japan's Fukushima prefecture, 175 miles north-east of Tokyo, Namie has become a silent town of ghosts and absent lives.

Namie's 21,000 residents remain evacuated because of continuing high radiation levels, the product of the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, six miles to the south. Homes, shops and streets are deserted except for the occasional police patrol or checkpoint.

Like the setting for a Hollywood post-apocalypse movie, grass and weeds poke up through cracked pavements. At an abandoned garage, a rusting car sits on a raised ramp, waiting for a repair that will never be completed. A feral dog peers from a wild, untended garden.

Namie is nobody's town now. Nobody lives here, and nobody visits for long. Even the looters have stopped bothering, and no one knows exactly when the inhabitants may be allowed to return permanently – or whether they will want to.

The 2011 catastrophe faded from world headlines long ago, but in Namie, Tomioka, Okuma, Futaba and other blighted towns in the 20-mile evacuation zone around the Fukushima plant, it is a disaster that never ends.

At the plant itself, recent leaks of contaminated water into the sea and a fraught operation to remove fuel rods from one of the damaged reactors have shown how critical the situation still is – and will remain during a decommissioning process that could take up to 40 years.

For Fukushima's displaced population, the effects of the disaster continue to be deeply felt. The evacuation area was subdivided earlier this year into three zones of higher or lower radiation risk. In the worst affected zone, return will not be allowed before 2017 at the earliest.

In other areas, families and businesses face difficult decisions about whether or not to go back. At present, no one is even allowed to stay overnight. Locals say that whatever happens, many younger people will not return.

There is little or no trust in official pronouncements, given the failure of the Fukushima Daiichi operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), to take adequate measures to protect the plant against the tsunami and the company's unimpressive post-disaster record.

There are suspicions that the government knows some towns may never be safe to live in again, but refuses to admit it in order to protect Japan's unpopular nuclear power industry. There is also a sense that Fukushima's victims have been forgotten.

That said, the painstaking cleanup continues and there has been some progress in adjoining, less badly affected areas, according to Hiroshi Murata, the head of the Odaka ward of Minamisoma City, close to Namie.

As many as 18,000 people died or were declared missing in Fukushima prefecture after the tsunami struck. The radiation plumes caused the forced evacuation of a further 154,000, according to the Japan Reconstruction Agency.

In Odaka, 148 people died, and there were more than 300 fatalities in Minamisoma as a whole. But now around 53% of Odaka residents have returned home, a total of 6,800 out of a pre-disaster population of 12,800, Murata said.

Nobody has died directly as a result of the nuclear disaster, but a close eye is being kept on the incidence of thyroid cancer in children, following the experience of Chernobyl.

The biggest issues the local administration now faces, following the rehousing of residents in temporary accommodation, are the demolition of unsafe houses, replacement of infrastructure and services, including roads and school playgrounds, and the decontamination and desalination of buildings and land.

"To decontaminate one house and garden takes 10 to 14 days," Murata said. "We have to remove surface soil, cut the trees, wash the roofs, clean the rain gutters. The house owners are responsible for cleaning inside. The city and the government help with the rest."

At least in Odaka there is something to clean and repair. In Ukedo, the part of Namie municipality closest to the Pacific ocean, the devastation is total. Hardly a single house was left standing by the tsunami, which reached 17m in height in some places, Murata said – a vast wall of water that devoured all in its path.

Wrecked fishing boats still lie stranded miles inland and there are vast piles of scrap metal, smashed cars, bits of concrete bridges and broken wooden house frames where once a thriving village stood. An abandoned elementary school, 500m from the sea, looks as though it has been bombed.

But even in Ukedo, a long line of displaced local resident volunteers can be seen picking up and sorting debris on a wintry afternoon, gradually clearing the land where homes formerly stood. With impressive organisation, the local authorities are recycling everything they can, bagging it up in vast compounds erected amid the bleak, salty flatlands that were once rice paddy fields.

Tetsurou Eguchi, the deputy mayor of Minamisoma City, said the radiation-related cleanup was likely to take another five to six years and could cost as much as ¥350bn (£2bn), much of which would come from the national government.

Post-tsunami reconstruction would take up to 10 years. But something intangible had been permanently lost, he said. "When it comes to the economy, and individual and social life, it is very difficult to recover this, compared with how it used to be."

The most challenging problem, he said, was decontamination. "Basically [the radioactive fallout] is not in the air any more. It's in the soil." The area was dependent economically on small businesses, agriculture, fishing and tourism, including the famous annual Soma Nomaioi samurai festival, he said. All had been seriously affected.

"People don't believe it is safe to visit here. They won't believe our produce, our livestock, our fish are safe. There is a blight. This will take a long time to change."

Much had been said by the national government about supporting Fukushima prefecture in its efforts to get back on its feet, but the reality is different, Eguchi said.

"It is a fact that we have received quite a lot of support, but is it sufficient? That is difficult, because it's not just a question of reconstruction. Politicians in Tokyo say if Fukushima does not recover, Japan will not recover, but I'm not sure they really mean that.

"I don't think Fukushima is fully supported by the whole country. And that's what the citizens here think."

Geoff Read' Strong Children Japan Project

January 3, 2014

Drawing out the demons and dreams of Fukushima

Artist's work with the marginalized takes him around the world and back to the place he once called home

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2014/01/03/our-lives/drawing-out-the-demons-and-dreams-of-fukushima/#.UscQhLTrV1s>

by Kris Kosaka

Geoff Read, artist and activist, hopes one portrait can echo thousands of miles. His poignant "artistic collaborations" indeed reverberate with the whispers of society's marginalized.

For more than 20 years, his collaborations have detailed the lives of homeless people from Mexico to England to Japan, and Read has also used art to help in drug rehabilitation and occupational therapy. His current focus: to broadcast the suspended dreams of Fukushima's children.

As Read explains, “In my Strong Children Japan Project, the most important thing the pictures can do is to help these children to have a safer childhood.”

Strong Children Japan showcases Read’s distinctive approach to portraiture, refined through his years of work within alienated communities around the world.

“What I find most interesting is to create portraits, which is something that I enjoy doing, but it is also a very good way of connecting with people,” the Briton, 55, explains. “If someone has a difficult life struggle in some way, it feels good to have a portrait made, since usually only people who are successful have that luxury, because they are famous or because they can afford it.

“I gradually evolved the approach of offering myself as an individual person’s artist-in-residence. Through the portrait, I try to show the person’s own ideas about what they are trying to do, what their circumstances are, how they see themselves and their connection to the world and what has happened to them.”

In the case of Strong Children Japan, Read paints those he knows personally. Read, his Japanese wife and young son were living in Fukushima at the time of the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster. His mother-in-law grew up in the Oku-Aizu region of western Fukushima. Read and his family moved from England in 2009, eager to raise their young son in a pastoral paradise they had not found in England.

“We had visited Fukushima before we moved there, and I thought it was such a beautiful place and the relationships between people were so strong,” he says. “They communicate through gifts of vegetables, and it is natural in the countryside to greet people with ‘Hello, have some corn,’ or ‘Good day, try this sweet potato.’ You almost can’t talk to people without them giving you something.

“I really wanted to learn that for my own life and our son’s, to experience it myself and tell others — because you do miss those connections in modern urban life. We don’t really know our neighbors, and if we do, we may just be arguing over a parking space.”

Read and his family struggled to stay in Fukushima after the tragedy.

“We self-evacuated for three weeks, and when it seemed the air radiation had calmed down, we moved back to see if it might be sustainable, to see if we could justify any possible risks to our son,” Read recalls.

“We felt a very strong commitment to our community. We were very strongly linked with our son’s friends, the hardworking teachers and my wife’s family. We felt a very strong connection and responsibility to that community, so we wanted to try and give it a go.”

Recording the stories of local children with his art came naturally to Read in that turbulent time.

“With the kind of artwork I do, doing the pictures is just the beginning. It should be a process, a circle, starting with the meeting between me and the person, going out into the world and back.

“We create the artwork together, but it is really my responsibility to make the image work in the way the children want it to, and get it seen by as many people as possible, and I especially feel this working with Fukushima’s children. It is very important that people actually see who these children are, and what their feelings about life are, because they are going to be controversial and argued about for a long time.”

As Read explains on his website: “The artwork is based on the principle that children are strongest and most resilient when they are listened to, respected and encouraged to think creatively and be active citizens. Developing their own ideas about their situation, noticing their own emotions, talking and making links with other people and the wider world also encourages them to take a proactive part in life.”

Read prioritizes the children’s own designs and image ideas, and the resulting artwork combines the children’s drawings with Read’s portrait of the child. Read hopes the works become a springboard for action.

“The art should make people think and talk about the topic — in this case, obviously, nuclear energy, what happens in a disaster, and what should happen. Then, if people see the image and are concerned about the children, they can respond to that in some way. Maybe they’ll write a letter to the Japanese ambassador or maybe they’ll write to the British newspapers and question our own disaster planning here in the U.K.”

The exhibition has traveled all the way from Fukushima and Hiroshima to the corridors of Parliament in England. In the House of Commons in London, Read gave a talk as part of a seminar against nuclear energy to commemorate the second anniversary of March 11.

The family is now back in England. Life in Fukushima proved too stressful, as their faith in government steadily dwindled.

“At the time, the authorities were still in absolute denial, and they were not prepared to respond seriously to the radiation issues,” Read explains. “Initially, there was no testing of food and hardly any of the

environment, and it was patently obvious the information we were getting was not trustworthy. We were pressing the local authorities to get proper testing equipment and to stop feeding the children local food until we were able to conduct testing because of the risks. But the thing that made it emotionally possible for us to leave was another natural disaster.”

Read lived in Kaneyama. After a rain-deluged July in 2011, the houses along the Tadami River were flooded, including Read’s.

“It was another man-made disaster, this time connected to a huge downpour; a wall of water came down, damaging dams and smashing houses. I really admire the workers and volunteers who risked their own safety, but the institutional complacency beforehand and inadequate evacuation plan were similar to the questionable procedures for Fukushima (No. 1 nuclear plant), and we just thought, ‘That’s enough.’ “

Currently, the exhibition can be seen at the community center in Showa, Fukushima Prefecture, with pictures from a sister project in Toowoomba, Queensland. Inspired by Read’s work, an Australian living in Fukushima at the time of the disaster started a similar project in Queensland, giving local children affected by flooding in Australia the chance to communicate their own worries and dreams with the children of Fukushima. Another recent project took Read to Hiroshima, where he helped create inspiring messages to Fukushima’s children from Hiroshima’s atomic bomb survivors.

“The Hiroshima peace exhibition organizers invited me to show the children’s pictures as part of the peace exhibition and conference they have every year,” he says. “I had a chance to meet some hibakusha, and I felt there was an important connection to be made. Sadly, in its history, Japan has suffered three of the world’s major nuclear disasters, and I have visited each of them. We evacuated first to Hiroshima and then visited Nagasaki. I think it is important to think about the experiences of the hibakusha who had to fight long and hard for recognition of their health problems.

“I was impressed and touched that there was a natural sympathy coming from the people I met in Hiroshima, who felt a very strong connection with Fukushima’s children. I wanted to make portraits that could act as a conduit for that empathy.”

Although Read trained as a fine artist at Newcastle Polytechnic, now Northumbria University, in northeast England, he says he has never worried much about using his art to make money.

“I think most creative people live hand to mouth, using different bits and pieces of work to support themselves while focusing on their art. Creative people tend to value time rather than money and I’ve always managed to get by with a variety of jobs, teaching work, editing, graphic design, illustration,

gardening. Having the time to do interesting things is more important to me." So too, it seems, is helping those in need.

On Saturdays, Telling Lives profiles interesting individuals with links to Japan. For more information, please see strongchildrenjapan.blogspot.jp or www.facethestreet.com. Send comments and ideas to community@japantimes.co.jp.

Year of the horse and disaster

January 4, 2014

In year of the horse, Fukushima local looks to horse festival to catch public attention

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140105p2a00m0na002000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- In 2014, the year of the horse on the Chinese zodiac, one local here is hoping a traditional horse festival can reignite wavering public interest in disaster-stricken areas.

Under a blue sky at the Fukono Nakayama Training Center, a horse named "Dragon Screw" ran in preparation for the Soma Nomaoui traditional horse festival that takes place in the region in July. The animal was originally to become a racehorse before it broke its right hind leg.

The center's representative, Isao Sato, 60, watched Dragon Screw practice. Sato is concerned both by a drop in public interest in areas hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and by the continued exodus of people from the area due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

"I hope that the Soma Nomaoui events will make this year one in which people do not forget the disasters or Fukushima," he said.

Reconstruction Minister hopeful

January 6, 2013

Minister: Fukushima to make major progress

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140106_22.html

Japan's Reconstruction Minister says Fukushima will make major progress in rebuilding this year.

Takumi Nemoto was delivering a New Year's address at the Reconstruction Agency's Fukushima office on

Monday -- the 1st work day of the year.

Nemoto said speeding up the reconstruction of areas affected by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident is a top priority of the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He said all those affected are still having difficulties.

Nemoto referred to new guidelines for financial support for evacuees from areas around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The government compiled the guidelines last month to help the evacuees quickly rebuild their lives.

Nemoto said he believes Fukushima will make significant progress toward reconstruction this year. He said this means **his ministry staff will have to work harder, and that he will also work hard to provide leadership.**

Jan. 6, 2014 - Updated 05:51 UTC

How to rebuild Futaba

January 6, 2013

Futaba reconstruction gets under way

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140106_21.html

The mayor of a Japanese town from which all the residents were evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear accident says the town's rebuilding will start in earnest this year.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa was speaking to about 70 town employees on Monday, the first day of business this year.

A ceremony was held at the town's temporary office, which was set up in Iwaki City last year.

He said he is facing the difficult decision of whether to allow the construction of an intermediate nuclear storage facility in the town. The central government made the request last month.

He said the government should provide the town with a sincere explanation for this.

The town will reopen its public schools this year in Iwaki City. Also this year, Fukushima Prefecture is due to build public housing for those who have lost their homes in disasters.

How to rebuild the town is a crucial question for residents who have been away for nearly 3 years.

Ninety-six percent of the town's population is barred from returning home for extended periods because of high radiation levels.

Jan. 6, 2014 - Updated 04:56 UTC

School in Fukushima starts again

January 8, 2014

Fukushima students restart school

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140108_23.html



Elementary and junior high school students in Fukushima Prefecture have returned to class after winter vacation. Nearly 3 years after the nuclear accident there, many still cannot go back to their hometowns.

At Arai Elementary School in Fukushima City, 280 children attended an opening ceremony on Wednesday.

Among them were 46 students from radiation-contaminated areas including Namie Town, near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

A girl from the town said she enjoyed her holidays by making a Christmas cake with her mother and playing with friends. She said she'll study hard before starting junior high in April.

The school's principal Yoshito Suzuki said children who evacuated the contaminated zone still live in tough conditions. He said teachers will provide them with mental health and other care.

Jan. 8, 2014 - Updated 07:29 UTC

Don't forget the people of Fukushima

January 12, 2014

January 12, 2013 Kaleidoscope of the Heart: Don't forget those still suffering from 2011 triple disasters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140112p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Rika Kayama

拡大写真

I went to Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, at the end of last month to hold a seminar for public officials who have been working hard for disaster recovery following the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. The seminar is something I have been holding since the disaster to provide psychological care for municipal officials.

Particularly in Fukushima Prefecture where many residents have had to evacuate and municipal offices have had to move in the wake of the nuclear power plant disaster, municipal officials are worn out.

Before the seminar, I visited the prefectural towns of Tomioka and Naraha where many residents are still unable to return. I could only enter areas that are designated as "zones preparing to lift evacuation orders" and "residency restriction zones."

I saw decontamination work being carried out in many places. While some workers were using heavy machines and high pressure washers, most people I saw were collecting leaves and scraping soil with bamboo brooms and deck brushes.

Meanwhile, even at large parks and on wide roads, it looked like only a few people were working on decontamination.

When I saw such a small number of workers, I thought, "They can only get so much done in a day." Workers must also feel exhausted when they see areas that have yet to be decontaminated after working all day and wonder, "When will it ever end?"

Of course, they are not the only ones who are wondering if decontamination work will ever end. Nearly 85,000 evacuees from those zones cannot return home until decontamination work is completed.

Just as I was visiting these evacuation zones, I heard on the car radio that the Ministry of the Environment decided to extend the duration of decontamination work under the direct jurisdiction of the government for a maximum of three years. The ministry had announced in January 2012 that decontamination work would be completed in all 11 municipalities subject to the cleaning plan by the end of fiscal 2013.

There are over 10 municipalities in Japan with areas that people can't enter, let alone live, with many residents forced to stay in evacuation. Such a fact should be treated as the top news story each year.

However, the three-year extension of the decontamination plan was not the top news story on the radio; instead Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine was the main news story.

How Japan functions as part of the world is important, but many people in this country are suffering from domestic problems and feeling hopeless. Some are in the midst of turmoil caused by the triple disasters. I am determined not to forget about these people in this new year. (By Rika Kayama, psychiatrist)

Tour Fukushima to get an idea of problems facing residents

January 14, 2013

Tour sheds light on Fukushima's disaster-affected area

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201401140001>

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--A group of researchers and students at Fukushima University are offering **a rare chance to see firsthand the problems facing this hard-hit prefecture.**

The "Fukushima-gaku Kochiku Project" (Project to construct Fukushima-gaku studies) gives tours of the area impacted by the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident.

Eight people from the Tokyo metropolitan area, including an employee in charge of corporate social responsibility at a major trading company and an official at the central government agency, attended the first excursion of the program on Nov. 16.

Taking a bus from Iwaki in the southern part of the prefecture, the group arrived in the town of Naraha, mostly inside the 20-kilometer restricted zone of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The town's residents can visit only in the daytime, but are forbidden from living there.

Yuki Morita, a first-year student at Fukushima University and a Naraha native, told the group about his experience as the Fukushima nuclear plant accident unfolded.

"I left home only bringing my pet hamster and study tools with me, assuming I would be able to return in a week or so," Morita, 19, recalled. "It turned out to be two years."

Black bags containing radiation-contaminated soil, a result of decontamination work, were seen here and there in town.

Next, the tour visited Yonomori, a neighborhood famous for cherry blossoms, in nearby Tomioka, also in the restricted zone. "Off limit" signs could be seen on barricaded houses.

"Without people living here, the town is losing its color," said Toshiyuki Kanno, a town official acting as tour guide.

He is especially upset over the infestation of rats, including ones measuring 30 centimeters, he said.

“The Fukushima crisis has yet to end, but the Japanese people are losing interest in the accident,” Kanno, 56, said. “To show the present status firsthand is a way to return our thanks for supporting us after the disaster.”

After visits to Naraha and Tomioka, participants returned to Iwaki and exchanged opinions and discussed various issues.

“Which is the goal--to have residents return to their hometown or to create a new community?” one participant asked.

“The situation differs community by community,” said another. “What should we start with?”

Struck by the power of what they had just witnessed, it seemed as if the participants were having trouble collecting their thoughts.

Saiko Matsunuma, a 42-year-old employee at a major food manufacturer in Tokyo, has participated in events to support Fukushima evacuees in the Tokyo area.

“I was able to realize the worsening conditions of the vacant houses evacuees had lived in,” Matsunuma said. “I want to utilize what I have seen for support activities from now on.”

A month after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and the nuclear power plant accident, Fukushima University set up the Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization.

The center, run by subsidies from the central government and corporate donations, deals with problems including education for child evacuees; reconstruction of municipalities whose residents are evacuating and community revitalization; and rice planting on an experimental basis in areas where rice growing is limited.

It has 63 researchers, and more than 50 students joined the center in October as supporters.

The center places greater emphasis on aiding the affected area over research.

Hiroshi Kainuma, a sociologist and a member of the center, pointed out, “The issues of the Fukushima nuclear accident-affected areas have become more and more complicated and understanding what the real problems are has become difficult to fathom from outside (the prefecture).”

With more than 1,000 days having passed since the disaster and the onset of the nuclear accident, anxieties are heightened about possible decreases in reconstruction budget and corporate support.

Kainuma said his group launched the excursion as “a system to exchange people and information between the disaster-affected areas and the areas outside Fukushima Prefecture.”

By Fukushima-gaku studies, Kainuma does not simply mean studies on reconstruction.

It aims at “consistently compiling intelligence that is born through reconstruction of Fukushima and presenting to society universal values,” according to Kainuma.

Building on the uniqueness of the nuclear plant accident, the study aims to understand the accident-afflicted area as a site where problems common to society had existed since pre-accident days.

To that end, Kainuma said, the group wants to build a sustainable study program.

The group will hold excursions on an irregular basis, as well as carry out interviews with 2,000 Fukushima residents.

For information about the excursions, send an e-mail to (corp@fukushimagaku.org).

Okuma to become a base for recovery

January 16, 2013



An artist's rendering of the base for recovery, which will be constructed in the southern part of Okuma town, Fukushima Prefecture (Provided by the Okuma town government)

Town in shadow of stricken nuclear plant to set up base for recovery

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201401160049

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--The southern part of this ghost town that co-hosts the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is to be turned into a base for recovery operations with thousands of new residents.

Municipal authorities, in announcing the decision on Jan. 15, said that about 3,000 people are expected to live in the 50-hectare area where radiation levels are relatively low. Of them, 2,000 will be mainly engaged in research for decommissioning the reactors and employees of companies working for the plant.

The project is set for completion by March 2018.

Prior to the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima plant, Okuma town had about 11,000 residents. All of them have since evacuated to other municipalities.

The compound of the nuclear plant is located in the northern part of the town.

Of the town's original population, 96 percent lived in neighboring areas where radiation levels are still high. Those areas are currently designated as difficult for people to return to.

However, the southern part of the town is designated as less serious in that while people are currently restricted from living there, they are able to contemplate their return once decontamination work is carried out.

The southern area to be used as a recovery site accounts for 0.6 percent of the town's total land area.

Prior to the nuclear accident, about 300 people, or 3 percent of the population, were living in the area.

On Jan. 15, the town authorities also announced a plan to complete construction of infrastructure that is vital for people's daily lives in all of the areas in the town, except for the compound of the nuclear plant, by April 2033.

The deadline was based on the projected decline in radiation levels following decontamination work.

It is the first time that a municipality affected by the nuclear accident set the deadline of that kind for areas including those designated as difficult to return to.

Returning Lost Photos (NHK video)

January 8, 2013

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201401081320.html>

A Fukushima (Ofunato) social welfare worker has retrieved 450,000 photos from the debris after 3/11.

She is trying to get the photos into the hands of their owners/families after cleaning them.

She hopes this will give people the emotional strength to start rebuilding their lives(as it did her).

Keeping Crops Clean (NHK video)

January 15, 2014

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201401151300.html>

Farmers in the Fukushima area have had to be creative to face consumers' suspicions that their produce is still contaminated.

Some people are growing stuff in a closed environment (eg. mushrooms or vegetables that use only clean water, not soil). A lettuce produced in this way and which doesn't need washing is being sold all the way to Tokyo.

The farmers hope this kind of initiative will help Fukushima farmers to recover.

Please keep using dosimeters

Janvier 21, 2014

Use of dosimeters falling sharply in Fukushima



http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140121_11.html

An NHK survey shows that the use of personal radiation dosimeters has dropped sharply in Fukushima Prefecture.

After the meltdown accident at the Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011, most municipalities in Fukushima handed out portable dosimeters to residents.

NHK contacted 26 municipalities that provide the devices, and found that a total of about 85,000 people are using them this fiscal year ending in March. That's down roughly 40 percent from 2011. Fukushima City was one of the municipalities where the decline was notable.

Doctor Osamu Saito, who provides health consultations to the city's residents, says one reason for the drop in use is the decline in radiation levels due to the passage of time.

He says parents are also starting to have qualms about having their children carry the devices at all times, as it inevitably keeps them stressed about radiation.

Dr. Saito recommends that people continue monitoring their external exposure levels, because not everything is known about the health risks of radiation.

Municipal authorities are also urging residents to keep on using the dosimeters.

Iwate demands damages from TEPCO

January 23, 2014

Iwate Prefecture files petition against TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140123_34.html

Prefectural and municipal governments in Iwate, northeastern Japan, have filed a petition with a state arbitrator to demand that the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant pay nearly 14 million dollars in damages.

The claim is the first by a prefectural government against Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, since the nuclear accident at the facility in 2011.

Iwate Prefecture's government and municipalities, along with other organizations, had demanded that TEPCO pay 73.8 million dollars in decontamination and labor costs. The firm refused to pay about one fifth of the amount.

On Thursday, officials representing 25 claimants, including the prefecture, many of its municipalities, and a garbage disposal service provider, filed the petition with the Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims in Tokyo.

Senior official Tomoya Odashima from Iwate's prefectural office said they decided to seek government arbitration as it's unlikely that they would get anywhere by continuing negotiations with TEPCO. The official called for a settlement that can end anxiety among local people.

Ichinoseki City Mayor Osamu Katsube said radiation hot spots in southern parts of Iwate have affected local agriculture and livestock industries.

Katsube said TEPCO should fully acknowledge its responsibility and compensate as soon as possible.

Cultural assets removed from evacuation zones

January 23, 2014

Cultural assets rescue mission ends in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140123_39.html

Officials in Fukushima Prefecture have finished moving cultural assets out of evacuation zones near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

A batch of earthenware, ancient documents and paintings was taken out of a Futaba Town museum on Thursday to be kept at a closed school in Soma City.

The move marked the end of a **one-and-half-year program to rescue assets left behind in museums in 3 municipalities near the damaged plant.**

Prefectural officials say a total of 3,100 boxes of properties have been taken to the temporary storage site.

An official in charge says the prefecture will now turn to preparing storage facilities for long-term care. The prefecture also plans to start rescuing cultural assets owned by individuals.

But officials face a challenge to secure roadside shrines and Buddhist statues. Their radioactivity levels may be too high to be taken out of the zones for preservation.

Children from disaster areas still suffering

January 27, 2014

Survey: 28% of kids from quake-hit areas suffer anxiety, depression

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/analysis/AJ201401270047>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

Almost 30 percent of children from the three prefectures in the Tohoku region that were the hardest hit by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami suffer from anxiety, depression and other mental problems, according to a health ministry study released Jan. 26.

“Many of the children have introvert problems, which are difficult to see at first,” said Takeo Fujiwara, a department director of the National Center for Child Health and Development. “We need to provide detailed assistance for them.”

Led by Shigeo Kure, pediatric professor at Tohoku University, the ministry's research team surveyed 178 children from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, who were between the ages of 3 to 6 at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The scientists interviewed the children and their parents or guardians around two years after the disaster.

The researchers later compared results from the Tohoku children with those of 82 children of the same age group in western Mie Prefecture.

After asking more than 100 questions designed to evaluate children's mental conditions, the scientists discovered that 28 percent of the Tohoku children--4.5 times the number of infants in Mie Prefecture--suffered from serious introversion as a mental issue. The condition included signs of social withdrawal and feelings of anxiety and depression.

According to the findings, 21 percent of the Tohoku children displayed aggressive behavior or other indicators of "extroverted" behavior, while 26 percent had social adjustment disorders or other "comprehensive" problems.

The investigators said the children need to receive medical attention as soon as possible, and that some of them had multiple problems.

The study also showed that the houses of 25 percent of the children from the disaster-hit areas were destroyed or swept away by the tsunami, while homes of the same percentage were badly damaged.

Fifty-eight percent of the children had stayed at their relatives' homes when the team carried out its investigation, and 31 percent said they used to live in evacuation shelters. Thirty-nine percent of the children had lived separately from their parents at least once after the disaster.

News Navigator: How are the emotional needs of children in Tohoku disaster areas being met?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140127p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Almost three years have passed since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing tsunami and nuclear disaster, but many are still suffering from their effects. The Mainichi Shimbun answers common questions readers may have about the state of psychological support for children from the disaster areas.

Question: Where do children from areas hit hard by the 2011 disasters receive mental health care?

Answer: Child psychiatrists have the most expertise on the needs of such children. They are psychiatrists trained in diagnosing and treating mental health problems that may arise in childhood.

However, according to a 2012 health ministry survey, the number of psychiatrists -- including child psychiatrists -- for every 100,000 people was 11.1 in Miyagi Prefecture, and 9.5 each in Iwate and Fukushima prefectures. These figures fell below the national average of 11.6. The triple disasters further aggravated this shortage, and while assistance has been provided from outside the three prefectures, more needs to be done to offer continuous psychiatric care in the region.

Question: Specifically how tight is the situation right now?

A: At Fukushima Medical University Hospital, for example, doctors are booked through the end of March, making it difficult for patients to receive care. In response, pediatricians and nonprofit organizations comprising volunteers with expertise are stepping in to help. In addition, the national government is dispatching greater numbers of school counselors to elementary and junior high schools.

Q: Does that mean the situation is getting better?

A: School counselors were increased starting in the 2011 academic year, with a total of 2,277 and 4,114 counselors newly working in the disaster areas in the 2011 and 2012 academic years, respectively; and 4,746 expected to have worked throughout the 2013 academic year ending in March.

However, an education ministry survey conducted in fiscal 2012 showed that the number of elementary and junior high school students refusing to go to school rose by 7.1 percent from the previous year to 2,511 in Miyagi Prefecture, and by 5 percent to 1,566 in Fukushima Prefecture.

The number dropped by 3.1 percent in Iwate Prefecture to 849 students, but according to the prefectural government, some 30 children per month consulted child psychiatrists for the first time between May and October 2013, a greater number than in the months immediately following the disasters. Such figures show the need for a reinforced framework for providing emotional support to children affected by the triple disasters. (Answers by Ryo Watanabe, Science and Environment News Department)

1 in 4 disaster-hit children needs mental care for problem behavior: study

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140127p2a00m0na013000c.html>

One in four children who were of nursery school age when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck their homes in northeastern Japan needs medical care for their problematic behavior, a survey by a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare study group has found.

The study team, headed by Tohoku University professor Shigeo Kure, attributed the children's behavior -- including violence and withdrawal -- to the deaths of their friends, separation from their parents and the life experiences they have gone through in disaster-hit areas, calling for swift measures for children in need of mental support.

The research group was joined by the National Center for Child Health and Development, Fukushima Medical University, the Miyagi Child and Family Mental Health Center, the Iwate Medical University, and other institutions. Takeo Fujiwara, a researcher at the National Center for Child Health and Development, released the study results at a symposium in Sendai on Jan. 26.

The survey covered 178 children and their parents and guardians who had been enrolled in classes for 3- to 5-year-old children at nursery schools in the three prefectures on March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the region, and who agreed to be surveyed. They underwent questionnaires and interviews between September 2012 and June 2013.

The nursery schools were located in Miyako, Rikuzentakata and Otsuchi in Iwate Prefecture; Kesenuma in Miyagi Prefecture; and Fukushima, Iwaki, Minamisoma and Tomioka in Fukushima Prefecture. A similar survey was also conducted in Mie Prefecture, which was not directly affected by the 2011 quake disaster, for comparison.

The questionnaire employed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), an internationally recognized method of identifying children's problem behavior through numerical comparisons of their behavior, which has been used by administrations, schools and medical institutions in Japan. The children were also interviewed for their state of mind by child psychiatrists and clinical psychologists while being taken care of mentally. Children who were diagnosed as being likely to develop problem behavior were further grouped into whether they were in need of mental care based on doctors' advice.

As a result, 25.9 percent of children in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures were diagnosed as being in need of medical care because of reasons including the loss of their friends to the disaster, partial

collapse of their homes, witnessing the oncoming tsunami, and separation from their parents. In Mie Prefecture, only 8.5 percent of children -- or one-third the figure in disaster-hit prefectures -- were diagnosed as being in such need of medical care.

Specifically, children in disaster-hit regions suffered from dizziness, nausea, headaches, swearing and reticence, among other symptoms. If left as they were, they are likely to suffer from learning and development disorders, affecting their access to higher education and employment, according to experts.

It is rare for such small children to undergo a survey like this on the effects of natural disasters. Past similar surveys covered relatively older children in studying the relations between disasters and their mental problems.

Makiko Okuyama, a researcher at the National Center for Child Health and Development who took part in the survey, said, "The fact that so many children are in need of psychological care has surfaced for the first time through objective data. It is generally known that the number of children who are in need of care increases immediately after a quake-disaster, but the survey was conducted over 1 1/2 years after the 2011 quake-disaster -- which is of particular concern. It is necessary to develop a system to support children in their local communities with the help of medical specialists and others."

The study team will continue to conduct similar surveys on the same children over the next decade to keep track of their status.

January 27, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Children in disaster areas still suffering mental stress: teachers

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140127p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Children in areas hit by the March 2011 triple disasters are displaying abnormal behavior, such as bullying those from areas hit by the nuclear crisis, highlighting their mental stress, reports to a national convention of the Japan Teachers Union (JTU) in Shiga Prefecture on Jan. 24-26 have revealed.

The reports also made it clear that for kids affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, emotional recovery may be difficult indeed.

"Go home to the nuclear zone," is one taunt flung at kids originally from near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, according to one 27-year-old teacher at a junior high school in Fukushima Prefecture.

"They probably don't mean much by it, but it really hurts the kids on the receiving end," she reported, and this kind of bullying has apparently become especially pronounced since last year.

Kids who transferred to new schools south of the nuclear plant area are also called "dappokusha" -- a term also used for North Korean defectors that literally means "person who left the north -- and some children are even shunned by their classmates.

"People have dark feelings about the nuclear plant, and in that kind of atmosphere they tend to direct their anger at those who used to live near the plant. The children are being influenced by that," the junior high teacher commented.

A third-grade elementary school teacher from a coastal community hit by the tsunami told the conference, "Even though the children saw so much death when the (3.11) disaster hit, they have no trouble telling other kids to 'die' or 'disappear.'"

The teacher added that there are children who, after their homes and schools were destroyed by the waves, spent their first two years of primary school living in temporary housing and going to class in space borrowed from other schools, such as gyms. "The stress has made it hard for some kids to relate to how other people feel," he said. "There are more and more children who can't seem to build human relationships. I'd say about half the kids in my class have issues that need to be dealt with as they grow up."

He further reported that the third graders he taught before the quake could form lines with no problem, but his current batch of kids can't.

"In the chaos after the disaster, schools couldn't enforce discipline at the level necessary, and the parents were so busy they couldn't keep a proper eye on them either. We have to do a real analysis of what causes the kids to act abnormally," he concluded.

At the end of the JTU conference on Jan. 26, the body released a statement declaring all the attendees "shared the view that it is of utmost importance to guarantee a vibrant learning experience for all our children."

Stealing dosimeters to pay debts

January 29, 2015

Fukushima official admits dosimeter thievery to pay gambling debts

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201501290043

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--A prefectural government employee here stole 181 dosimeters and sold them to pay off gambling debts, authorities said.

The employee in his 30s had admitted to the theft of government-owned personal dosimeters worth 3.75 million yen (\$32,000), officials said Jan. 28.

The prefectural government is considering criminal charges of theft.

Officials said that between October and November 2013 the employee served as chief examiner of the government's regional medical service division in charge of managing and tracking personal dosimeters used for measuring radiation exposure during evacuation drills.

During that time, the suspect pilfered the 181 dosimeters from lockers and storage areas and sold them to a recycling manufacturer in Fukushima and a buyer in Saitama Prefecture for about 900,000 yen.

The man used most of the money to pay off pachinko gaming debts, officials said.

Fukushima in Paris

January 28, 2014

Expressing thanks in Paris, Fukushima officials vow disaster reconstruction

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/01/28/national/expressing-thanks-in-paris-fukushima-officials-vow-disaster-reconstruction/#.Uufl0bTjJ1s>

JJI

PARIS – Representatives of Fukushima Prefecture pledged to achieve reconstruction from the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami and the subsequent nuclear crisis at an event in Paris on Monday.

The event, held to provide updates on the progress of disaster reconstruction, senior Fukushima officials and local businessmen expressed their appreciation for French assistance in the reconstruction efforts and underlined the safety of food products from the prefecture.

Terunori Igarashi, head of the prefectural government's tourism exchange bureau, explained how Fukushima agricultural products are checked for radioactive contamination.

He also gave a presentation about tourist spots, including Tsurugajo Castle in Aizuwakamatsu, the setting for an NHK historical drama produced last year.

“However difficult the situation is, Fukushima will come back,” Igarashi said.

Six students from Tomioka High School took part in the event. They have been forced to evacuate because the school is located in the exclusion zone surrounding Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Hiroto Takahashi, 17, introduced the activities of the school’s soccer club, which participated in a national tournament.

“I’m proud of being a student of Tomioka High School and enjoying my school life,” he said.

The event was held on the sidelines of an international exhibition of furniture held in a Paris suburb in which 28 companies from Fukushima participated.

Fukushima in Paris (2): All is fine

January 28, 2014

Paris event promotes safety of Fukushima products

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140128_16.html

An event has been held in Paris to promote the safety of agricultural and marine products from Fukushima.

The City of Paris and the Fukushima prefectural government co-hosted the event on Monday. It was attended by some 120 people, including French restaurateurs and members of a Fukushima support group based in Paris.

The head of the prefecture's tourism bureau, Terunori Igarashi, explained to the gathering that products from Fukushima, including rice, vegetables and seafood, undergo strict radiation checks.

He said only products that pass government standards are put on the market.

A student from a high school in the evacuation zone expressed his appreciation in French for the support they have received.

The event showcased various Fukushima products, and participants got to taste 4 different kinds of local sake.

One French participant said it is good to let consumers know that all Fukushima food products are safety-tested.

He added that he hopes the region's recovery will become an inspiration for the rest of the world.

School trips to Fukushima

February 01, 2014

High school trips to Fukushima give real-life look at 3/11 disasters

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201402010011

By YASUO KOJIMA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Before the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the start of the nuclear crisis, Fukushima Prefecture was a popular draw for school trips, boasting an abundance of nature and onsen hot springs resorts.

Now, more than three years later, **schools are starting to send their students back to Fukushima to visit the disaster-stricken coastal areas and talk to survivors** such as Teiko Kida, 65, a farmer in Iwaki.

"I was glad that young people were interested in learning about the disaster," Kida said. "I was encouraged to work toward reconstruction."

Kida talked with students from Fukuoka Prefectural Shuyukan Senior High School in Fukuoka, which sent all second-year students to Fukushima Prefecture from Jan. 8-9. Of the 365 students, 126 visited the hard-hit coastal areas of Iwaki and listened to first-hand accounts about the disasters.

Kunichika Okuyama, the 58-year-old principal of Shuyukan Senior High School, said, "Unlike those survivors in Miyagi Prefecture, Fukushima Prefecture residents had to suffer from harmful rumors and evacuation due to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant accident. I believe students felt their resilience and kindness and love."

One male student told his peers, "We may face difficulties in the future, but I want you to be as strong as are those survivors in Fukushima Prefecture."

Prefectural employees have worked earnestly to win back the school trips and excursions, inviting the nation's schools to come "see the real Fukushima, which is not explained in school textbooks," as well as touting the safety there.

According to the Fukushima Prefecture Tourism and Local Products Association, the number of elementary, junior and senior high schools and universities in prefectures outside Fukushima on "educational trips" plummeted from 4,779 in fiscal 2009 and 4,831 in fiscal 2010 to only 760 in fiscal 2011.

Officials attribute the sharp drop to opposition from parents, who were worried about aftershocks or affected by rumors and news reports about the nuclear plant accident.

Thanks partly to the effort by the association and hotel operators to attract school groups and tourism agencies, 1,592 schools, with about 150,000 students, came to the prefecture on educational trips in fiscal 2012.

From the Kyushu region, including Fukuoka Prefecture, no high school group visited in fiscal 2011 and 2012, compared with 26 in fiscal 2009 and 37 in fiscal 2010. In fiscal 2011, all 50 high schools that had planned to come to Fukushima Prefecture canceled the trip.

This fiscal year, which ends in March, 12 Kyushu high schools visited or will visit the prefecture for educational trips.

On a recent trip, students from Nagasaki Nishi High School in Nagasaki listened to evacuees, including a couple who fled from Okuma in the evacuation zone of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

A female high school student said, "What we, residents in Kyushu, can do is not forget the fact that there are people still suffering from the disaster, and to tell what we have learned to the people around us."

Kenji Takushima, vice principal of Nagasaki Nishi High School, said, "Stories those local residents told us were different from what the news reports said. I am glad to have sent students there."

In an effort to attract schools for educational trips, the Fukushima prefecture tourism association and other organizations developed travel plans, distributed pamphlets, radiation dosage charts and exposure estimates.

“Now is the only chance (for students) to see Fukushima working toward reconstruction,” said a tourism association official. “We have been telling school officials that seeing disaster victims facing difficulties would give some hints as to when students have to row against the wind in the future.”

The association officials said that they believe the number of school trips will increase this fiscal year.

Draft reconstruction plan for Iitate

February 3, 2014

Iitate village panel draws up reconstruction plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140203_14.html

A panel set up by Iitate Village near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has released a draft reconstruction plan. High radiation levels in the village are still preventing residents from returning, nearly 3 years after the accident.

The panel, made up of villagers and experts, unveiled the draft last week. It calls for setting up a 26-hectare area to serve as the base for reconstruction. It aims to start building in the area as early as fiscal 2015.

The area would include public housing for elderly people who have difficulty living alone and facilities to revive local industries and create jobs.

It would also feature a major solar power plant as a symbol of a village that is energy self-reliant.

The panel is also calling on village officials to consider allowing most residents to return as early as March 2016. This is later than the initial target date of the spring of 2015, due to major delays in decontamination work.

The panel members say they will continue discussing the draft plan and submit it to the local assembly next month.

Iitate Village Mayor Norio Kanno praised the draft, saying he thinks it is important to set up an area where people can see the village coming back to life.

He says his village needs to clear many obstacles before implementing the plan, but that he will work hard while listening to what the assembly and residents have to say.

Feb. 3, 2014 - Updated 03:21 UTC

Request for "sincerity" in paying compensation

February 6, 2014

Fukushima officials call for swift compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140206_37.html

A delegation from Fukushima Prefecture has asked the operator of the damaged nuclear power plant to swiftly compensate those affected by the 2011 accident.

Vice Governor Fumio Murata and officials of municipalities and farming, business and other groups visited Tokyo Electric Power Company on Thursday.

They handed in a written request to TEPCO President Naomi Hirose. It calls on the utility to pay compensation in an appropriate and swift manner.

They made the request after a science ministry panel on damage claims compiled a set of new guidelines on additional compensation in December.

Murata also asked for a compensation deadline extension for those who lost their jobs due to the accident. They include those who used to work in evacuation areas. The term expires in February.

Hirose said TEPCO will announce within days what to do with the payment after March.

Murata welcomed his response, but renewed his call on the utility to deal with the entire compensation issue with what he called sincerity.

Rebuilding Fukushima

February 7, 2014

Lessons for fixing Fukushima

BY CHRISTOPHER HOBSON

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

In March 2011 all of Japan was united by the terrible experience of the earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear accident. Three years later this unity is increasingly fracturing as a more complex and uneven reality emerges.

For the vast majority of the country that was not directly affected, the memories of those tragic events are beginning to fade, as other concerns — especially the economy — dominate. Meanwhile, the victims of the triple disaster still struggle to restart or move on with their lives.

Many wait in temporary accommodation, some with hope that their towns will be rebuilt, while many others remain in limbo wondering when — if ever — radiation levels will become low enough that they feel it is safe to return.

And there are also many others who see no future in Fukushima, and have decided to start new lives elsewhere. From the common tragedy of 3/11, a range of different experiences and realities have subsequently appeared. Moving forward, one of the great challenges will be developing a more flexible approach to rebuilding that takes into account the wide range of experiences and expectations of affected people.

What has become clear is that rebuilding cannot only be about dealing with technical problems like decontamination. Reducing radiation levels to scientifically safe amounts will do little if people do not believe that they can live there safely. People need to feel confident that they can trust what they are being told. And many — with good reason — remain deeply skeptical of the information they are given by the government or Tokyo Electric Power Co. officials.

Rebuilding this trust is a much more difficult task than rebuilding infrastructure, and one for which there is not an easy solution. You cannot subcontract out trust building. It takes time, it takes effort and engagement, and it requires transparency from the government, the Nuclear Regulation Authority and Tepco. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe brashly announcing to the world when campaigning for the Olympics that the nuclear accident is “under control” is precisely the opposite of the more measured and honest approach that is needed to help restore trust.

Certainly the challenges facing Japan are unique given the unprecedented combination of natural and technological disasters, but there are many experiences that Japan can still learn from.

The most fundamental lesson that has emerged from previous nuclear accidents at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island is that the biggest impacts were social and psychological. Knowing this, much greater efforts must be made to address the mental and social fallout of Fukushima.

Considering that the huge amount of money and effort expended on decontamination has yet to convince many former residents that it might be safe to return, it would be advisable to begin investing much more in social infrastructure and building support networks for affected people.

In Ukraine they have established a number of special community centers to assist residents by sharing information, building awareness about radiation, and strengthening community bonds. This offers a very good model that Japan can learn from and should consider implementing in Tohoku. Such initiatives should not be about convincing people to return, but about providing them with more information, trying to rebuild trust, and assisting them in making their own decisions about the future.

One country that many people have looked to is Germany and its decision to embark on an “energy revolution” (*Energiewende*). For anti-nuclear supporters, Germany is an example of what Japan should be doing. But the lesson that should be taken from Germany is not the decision itself, but the process by which it was reached. German Chancellor Angela Merkel created an Ethics Commission on Safe Energy Supply, composed of a cross section of German society with representatives from politics, industry, academia and religion. They collectively reflected on what was best for the country and its future, and then reached a unanimous set of recommendations. The conclusion that Germany should abandon nuclear power is one that matches with its history and politics, and is supported by many parts of society.

But what is best for Japan may well be different. Now in Japan debate has become polarized between anti- and pro-nuclear camps, and there is a need to build genuine dialogue between these opposing positions. Japan has an important and difficult set of issues to consider, connected to its history, its vulnerability to natural hazards, its economic situation, its lack of resources, and the demands of a changing climate. There is no easy solution to Japan’s energy dilemma, so different options need to be openly and carefully

debated, and hopefully greater consensus can be developed in time. This is the lesson to take from Germany.

Three years later and many of the most serious challenges that remain are not technical ones to do with clearing waste or rebuilding infrastructure, they are social: rebuilding trust and restoring a sense of security and wellbeing for affected people.

There is still much work to be done, and a necessary step is developing a more flexible, reflexive and transparent approach to rebuilding that engages with people's concerns, acknowledges their diverse realities, and supports their life choices, regardless of whether they decide to return to their hometowns or seek new lives elsewhere. This is the only way that the people of Tohoku might again be given the futures they want and deserve.

Christopher Hobson is an assistant political science professor at Waseda University, and a visiting research fellow at the United Nations University. This piece draws on findings from an international symposium held in Fukushima city on Feb. 3 that was hosted by the United Nations University and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies.

TEPCO will accept arbitrator

February 7, 2014

TEPCO to accept arbitrator's settlement plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140207_43.html

The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has agreed to accept an arbitrator's plan to settle compensation claims by residents and evacuees over their health concerns.

About 180 former residents of Iitate Village and some 1,000 residents in Date City filed a motion with the Center for the Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims. It was set up by the science ministry.

They demanded compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, saying they have health concerns due to possible exposure to radiation.

The center has suggested it supports the residents' demands, while TEPCO had argued that the residents' claims lack scientific grounds.

But on Friday, the utility reversed its stance, saying that it will agree to pay compensation to the residents of the areas. It added it recognizes the need for a quick agreement.

In a published comment TEPCO said it believes it has no responsibility to offer compensation but it takes into account the situation facing the residents of these areas.

Nationwide helpline on compensation

February 11, 2014

Volunteers advise on Fukushima evacuees' damages

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140211_17.html

A group of judicial experts sponsored a nationwide helpline to counsel evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear crisis on how to file compensation claims.

An organization of judicial scriveners held the event on Tuesday at 20 locations, including Fukushima and Tokyo.

The experts say there are still many evacuees who are not familiar with how to claim compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company 3 years after the nuclear crisis.

In Tokyo, 10 people answered telephone inquiries from victims. One of them asked whether an evacuee who lived near the nuclear plant at the time of the disaster could be compensated despite lacking a local residence registry.

An expert answered that the person should be compensated and may be able to file a motion with a government-backed arbitrator that mediates settlements with the utility

Nurses shortage in Fukushima

February 13, 2014

Fukushima hospitals hold event to attract nurses

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140213_35.html

A hospital association in Fukushima Prefecture is trying to invite nurses from the Tokyo Metropolitan area to local medical institutions suffering from staff shortages after the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The association on Thursday organized a tour of a hospital in Hirono Town, about 25 kilometers from the damaged plant. Four nurses, in their 20s to 50s from Tokyo and surrounding areas, took part in the event.

Another nurse who was transferred last year to the hospital from Maebashi City, north of Tokyo, guided the participants.

The number of nurses there dropped from 33 to 5 at one point after the accident. It is now operating with the help of about 20 nurses dispatched from across the country.

But the hospital still cannot receive inpatients because of an insufficient number of nurses.

6 of 20 participants in similar tours the association arranged last year have decided to work at medical institutions in Fukushima.

The prefecture and the association say they want to resolve nurse shortages through such efforts.
Feb. 13, 2014 - Updated 10:05 UTC

Recovery money not going where it should

February 04, 2014

Local residents say ballooning public works budget not going where needed

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201402040052>

The Abe administration has massively increased budgetary outlays for public works projects as part of recovery efforts from the Great East Japan Earthquake, but some residents at the local level are complaining the funds are not going where they are needed most.

Since Shinzo Abe took over as prime minister in December 2012, spending on national roads has increased at least eight-fold compared to the fiscal 2010 budget.

"There are other projects the money could go to," said Yasutada Onodera, 38, who operates a chain of coffee shops in Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture.

On Dec. 7, 2012, a tsunami warning was issued following an earthquake that registered 5 on the Japanese scale of 7 that struck the Tohoku region. At that time, Onodera tried to flee in his car from the temporary shop he was in just 500 meters from the ocean to higher ground. However, traffic tie-ups prevented many from effectively evacuating the area.

Onodera said he feels not much has been learned from the March 11, 2011, twin disasters.

"The reason so many people died was not because the coastal levee was too low, but because they could not flee due to the traffic jams," Onodera said.

He and some of his neighbors lobbied the city government to construct more roads to help ensure that people could reach higher ground more quickly if the need should arise. Nothing has come of that effort so far, he said.

A big reason for the massive increase in spending from 2010 to 2012 was due in part to a decision by the then-ruling Democratic Party of Japan to freeze road construction if there was no realistic way to complete the project within three years. In fiscal 2010, 144 such projects were frozen, and only 13.7 billion yen (\$134 million) from the initial budget was allocated for those projects.

While the DPJ government would go on to more than double road construction spending on the same frozen projects for the following 2011 fiscal year, the figure still pales in comparison to that budgeted by the Abe administration.

The compilation of the supplementary budget for fiscal 2012 and the initial budget for fiscal 2013 included road construction expenditures for those projects totaling 113.6 billion yen.

In the meantime, about 1 trillion yen has been set aside to construct higher levees along the coast of the disaster-stricken areas.

An official with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism touched on the history of the decision-making process.

Immediately after the twin disasters, a number of local governments asked the ministry to include funds to build evacuation routes in their budget. However, the Reconstruction Agency instead emphasized the need to rebuild levees that were damaged by the disasters, the official said.

"While huge amounts of funding were earmarked to go to levee reconstruction, no money for small roads costing several tens of millions of yen was approved," the ministry official said. "The reason is the rigidity of the entire system."

The Abe administration is continuing its emphasis on public works projects in its fiscal 2014 budget, with a 2-percent increase to a total of about 6 trillion yen. Of that amount, about 2 trillion yen is being set aside for road construction.

(This article was written by Yo Noguchi and Eiji Zakoda.)

The Road Ahead : Fukushima's Left-behind Pets

The Road Ahead: Fukushima's Left-behind Pets

Aired on Feb. 12

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201402121023.html>

Animals left behind in evacuated zones in Fukushima are struggling to survive another harsh winter. They depend on intermittent visits from owners and volunteers.

"I want litate to be a safe place", says one of the evacuees who comes several times a week to feed her dog.

People need better shared information

February 18, 2014

Fukushima people want better information flow

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140218_21.html

Officials from the public and private sectors in Fukushima Prefecture want the central government to do a better job of sharing information about the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The industry ministry on Monday convened a conference comprising heads of municipalities near the plant, educators, business leaders and other representatives.

People attending the meeting said announcements by the government and the plant's operator contain many technical terms that the general public find hard to understand.

They also said much of the information concerns problems concerning the facility, and this discourages evacuated residents from returning to their homes.

Fukushima Prefecture Vice Governor Masao Uchibori said progress in dealing with the stricken plant should be measured in shorter periods of time.

He said that it is now measured in decades, making it impossible to determine whether work is proceeding smoothly. Uchibori said that also makes it hard for residents who have left the area to decide whether they should return.

An industry ministry official replied that the government will study what it can do before the next review of the situation at the plant.

Feb. 18, 2014 - Updated 02:52 UTC

"The people living in Hadenya"

February 19, 2014

Film shows lifestyles of traditional Miyagi village before 3/11 disaster

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201402190004

By YOSHIYUKI ITO/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SANRIKU, Miyagi Prefecture--A filmmaker who started documenting a fishing community in this town, three years before it was swept away by the tsunami on March 11, 2011, will soon release his work at mini theaters across the country.

“The People Living in Hadenya--Part One” was directed by Kazuki Agatsuma, who survived the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The 28-year-old was a researcher in folklore studies at Tohoku Gakuin University in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, when he first encountered the Hadenya district of Minami-Sanriku in 2005. He became interested in the tight-knit community, which revolves around a traditional mutual assistance framework, known as “keiyakuko,” found throughout the Tohoku region.

In February 2008, Agatsuma commenced filming in Hadenya, where mountains stretch almost to the coast. At the time, most of the 80 households in the community made their livelihoods from oyster, ascidian, and seaweed farming.

The film shows how keiyakuko dictates the lifestyles of the residents.

In the film, parents openly discuss the pros and cons of letting their children leave the community after they come of age, and the impact such an exodus might have on the survival of the keiyakuko culture.

Keiyakuko was traditionally started among families who had lived in the area for generations. But emerging households embarked on aquafarming from the 1970s onward, and they quickly gained economic clout. As a result, the surface of the ocean soon became covered with aquafarming racks, and the quality of seaweed began to decrease.

The film conveys the reality of Hadenya through various images of daily life such as a fisherman and his wife preparing for oyster farming and a traditional event called “oshishisama,” in which an exorcist lion dancer visits each household in March.

Agatsuma said there were times, however, when he struggled to get people to speak their minds, and filming did not go as planned. But the residents encouraged him to finish shooting. “You should make a film that makes people cry,” he said one of the people in the community told him.

On March 11, 2011, Agatsuma was heading to Hadenya to set the date for a movie preview with the local people who cooperated in the production. As the tsunami hit, he abandoned his vehicle and film equipment and sprinted up the mountain to safety.

The next morning, he managed to reach the community, only to find that everything had been swept away by the tsunami. Among the dead were fishermen and junior high school students with whom he had become close through interviews. Agatsuma joined efforts to help remove the enormous amount of debris and pump out the water from the community.

Four days after the disaster, Agatsuma returned to his hometown Shiroishi in the prefecture. In the wake of the catastrophe, he ruminated over the significance of depicting the pre-earthquake lifestyle of the Hadenya residents, whose houses were swept away by the ocean.

His first cut of the film turned out to be an epic six hours, while the second was trimmed to 56 minutes. But neither version satisfied the filmmaker. In the end, he settled on a final cut that runs 134 minutes.

Although the film shows some scenes of debris scattered throughout the community, Agatsuma said he decided not to dwell on the disaster because he was aiming to convey a different message.

“With this film I set out to tell a universal truth that no matter what happens, life goes on,” he said.

Music for Fukushima

February 18, 2014

Fukushima kids compose for Philharmonic

by Chiho Iuchi



Staff Writer

The Sony Music Foundation took the opportunity of the New York Philharmonic's current Asia tour to organize a special event on Feb. 11. The concert aimed to provide Japanese youth — some of whom were from Fukushima Prefecture — with first-class live performances by a top-rate orchestra.

Fukushima is still recovering from the Great East Japan Earthquake, which struck on March 11, 2011.

The night began with Benjamin Britten's "The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," led by assistant conductor Joshua Weilerstein and narrated in Japanese by music director Alan Gilbert, whose mother, Philharmonic violinist Yoko Takebe, is from Japan.

This led into a special feature, "Music for Fukushima," which comprised short pieces composed by students between the ages of 10 and 15, and is the result of an ongoing project between Fukushima and New York youth.

The Japanese pieces were written by students studying composition under professor Takehito Shimazu of Fukushima University, who also teaches at the institution's attached junior high school. Inspired by these

compositions, the New York-based students of the Philharmonic's Very Young Composers program wrote their own compositions in response, resulting in a symphonic back-and-forth.

"Wave," a somber piece by Karin Utagawa that uses quintuplets was countered with Julia Arancio's "Unity"; "Flowers of Four Seasons" by Yuki Iwamoto motivated Austin Celestin to compose "City Life"; and "Happy Life" by Hiroaki Iwamoto, which features something of a traditional Japanese melody, was answered with Jake O'Brien's jazzy "Traffic Lights."

"Music composed by children is wonderful, honest, and more complex than we might think," said Jon Deak, who is in charge of the project. "They have their own language. In the scores they wrote, there were many parts that might seem strange to adult ears, but we try not to edit or 'correct' them. We need to hear that fresh voice of the child, I believe it is vital for the future of music."

Deak mentioned that the Fukushima compositions were not confined to painful themes. Shimazu explained the students aren't defined by the disaster, "(they) are concerned about a dream for their future, the same as any other child."

The night came to a close with Leonard Bernstein's "Symphonic Dances from West Side Story" and George's Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," which were both conducted by Gilbert, and the latter featuring pianist Makoto Ozone.

Symposiums on Fukushima to be held by the University of Tokyo

February 19, 2014

Tokyo University to host symposiums on Fukushima crisis

The University of Tokyo will hold symposiums on March 9 and 11 on its Hongo campus to mark the third anniversary of the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Scholars will speak on "Energy risk governance" during the March 9 event and on "Public commons for whom?" on March 11.

The March 9 symposium will start with a message from Calestous Juma, a professor at Harvard Kennedy School, on Japan's international role in conversion to renewable energy sources.

Participants in the March 9 event will include Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who served as head of the Diet's committee to investigate the Fukushima crisis, and Kan Suzuki, who was education and science senior vice minister at the time of the crisis.

Experts from the University of Tokyo will report on soil conditions and the physical conditions of people in Fukushima. Scholars from the fields of physics, philosophy and economics will also take part.

In the March 11 event, scholars of philosophy and ethics will discuss how their disciplines can contribute to improving the well-being of people in contemporary society. Members of the audience will be given a chance to join the discussions.

The March 9 symposium will start at 1 p.m. in Fukutake Hall and the March 11 event will start at 6 p.m. in Room 92B in the Kogakubu Nigo-kan Building, both on the Hongo campus. Both symposiums will be conducted in Japanese.

Anyone interested can send an email to gakugeifu@yahoo.co.jp, indicating his or her name, contact information and the event(s) he or she wants to attend. Up to 200 people will be accepted. For more information, visit www.tokyoartopera.com/#!symposium/c1vs6.

Fishermen worried

February 20, 2014

Fishermen worried about Fukushima leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140220_34.html

Fishermen in northeastern Japan have voiced strong concerns about a new leak of highly radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The head of a fishermen's group in Fukushima Prefecture, Masakazu Yabuki, said on Thursday the leak of 100 tons was not small and could cause anxiety about the safety of local fish among consumers nationwide.

He added that local fisheries groups have started test-catches of marine products.

Another group's chief, Hiroyuki Sato, said on Thursday that if the leak was caused by human error, it should never have happened.

Sato said that if the situation continues, it will add to fishermen's distrust in the plant's operator, Tokyo

Electric Power Company.

He said that could also hinder the utility's plan to release groundwater into the sea before it gets tainted with radioactive substances.

Death toll in Fukushima

[Post-quake illnesses kill more in Fukushima than 2011 disaster]

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/02/20/national/post-quake-illnesses-kill-more-in-fukushima-than-2011-disaster/#.UwWxhIXrV1t>

Fukushima stress deaths top 3/11 toll

Uncertainties amid nuclear crisis acutely felt by elderly

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/02/20/national/post-quake-illnesses-kill-more-in-fukushima-than-2011-disaster/#.UwcKq4XrV1v>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Stress and other illnesses related to the 2011 quake and tsunami have killed 1,656 people in Fukushima Prefecture as of Wednesday, outnumbering the 1,607 whose deaths were directly tied to disaster-caused injuries, according to data compiled by the prefecture and local police.

A prefectural official said many people “have undergone drastic changes in their lives and are still unable to map out their future plans, such as homecoming, causing increased stress on them.”

Around 136,000 people are still displaced in the prefecture, which has had to cope with the devastating effects of the natural disasters and the subsequent meltdown at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power station.

Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate, three eastern prefectures lying on Japan’s Pacific Rim, sustained the most severe damage from the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

But it is the death toll from indirect causes in Fukushima — now standing at more than 1,600 — that has become conspicuous, particularly when compared to Iwate’s 434 and Miyagi’s 879.

Around 90 percent of those who died of indirect causes were aged 66 or older, according to Reconstruction Agency statistics published in September.

The city of Minamisoma had the largest toll, with 447 deaths indirectly blamed on the disaster, followed by 317 in the town of Namie and 225 in Tomioka.

Part of Minamisoma and the entire towns of Namie and Tomioka became designated evacuation zones after the nuclear meltdowns that spewed radioactive materials into the air.

The prefecture plans to step up a watch on evacuated residents at temporary housing and private apartments, working together with municipal agencies in an attempt to limit such deaths.

Unlike those caused by collapsed buildings or tsunami, indirect deaths are determined by municipal panels by examining links between the disaster and the cause of death. This occurs when a relative of a deceased files a request.

Causes of indirect deaths include physical and mental stress stemming from long stays at shelters, a lack of initial care as a result of hospitals being disabled by the disaster, and suicides.

Since the quake, the health ministry has provided a yardstick for recognizing disaster-linked deaths based on criteria compiled by Nagaoka in Niigata Prefecture following a magnitude-6.8 earthquake that struck the area in 2004. The ministry said the possibility of indirectly caused deaths rapidly diminishes one month after the disaster.

But given that such deaths are increasing nearly three years after the Fukushima disaster, experts say a new set of criteria may be necessary in order to take into account the effects of the nuclear plant catastrophe.

Fukushima lags behind

February 22, 2014

Fukushima lags behind Miyagi, Iwate in processing of quake, tsunami debris

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140222p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Just 68 percent of the quake and tsunami debris left in non-restricted areas of Fukushima Prefecture had been processed as of the end of January, the Ministry of the Environment announced on Feb. 21 -- trailing Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, where 98 percent of the debris had been processed.

In Fukushima Prefecture, where officials have struggled to secure temporary storage sites, the figure released by the ministry does not include areas that are still under evacuation orders as a result of the nuclear disaster triggered there by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The ministry plans to finish transporting debris to temporary storage facilities during this fiscal year.

An estimated 16.94 million tons of debris was produced along the coasts of the three prefectures in the wake of the disasters. Of this, a total of 16.13 million tons has been processed. This figure includes 97 percent of the debris from Iwate Prefecture, and 99 percent of the debris from Miyagi Prefecture.

Of the estimated 10.84 million tons of material deposited in the three prefectures, including sediment and fishing equipment, 9.61 million tons (89 percent) had been processed as of the end of January.

A total of 620,000 tons of quake and tsunami debris that couldn't be processed within Iwate and Miyagi prefectures has been moved for handling in other prefectures. Tokyo and 17 other prefectures finished bringing in debris on Feb. 21. In these prefectures, 610,000 tons had been processed as of the end of January.

Alternative dispute resolution needed

Nuclear disaster victims look to dispute resolution system for compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140222p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Some 5,000 residents from areas outside evacuation zones near the crippled nuclear plant in Fukushima Prefecture are preparing to use an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system to demand Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) pay them more damages in connection with the nuclear crisis.

A local citizens' organization will file a petition on behalf of the residents, who live in the cities of Fukushima, Koriyama and Iwaki, with the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center, an ADR entity, on March 5. Such a large-scale petition for nuclear accident compensation being launched by residents outside evacuation zones is unprecedented.

The citizens' organization, which involves the Social Democratic Party's local chapter and other entities, will encourage all Fukushima Prefecture residents to join in the petition.

"Residents outside evacuation zones are also worried about the nuclear crisis," says Mitsuaki Karino, a member of the Iwaki Municipal Assembly who co-leads the citizens' group. "It's unfair for TEPCO to discontinue what is only a small amount of damages after a short period. With the petition, we'd also like to prevent people's memory of the nuclear disaster from fading."

Under the standards set by TEPCO, which operates the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, each adult living in the three cities -- which are designated as priority zones for surveying radioactive contamination -- is entitled to 120,000 yen as a lump sum payment for mental and emotional distress. Children and expectant mothers in these areas can receive up to 720,000 yen.

However, noting that residents from areas designated as evacuation zones are entitled to 100,000 yen a month, the citizens' group argues that a wide gap in the amounts of compensation between residents of different areas has caused prejudice and conflict among Fukushima residents.

Through the petition, the organization is set to demand, on behalf of some 5,000 residents of the three cities, that TEPCO increase the amount of compensation by about 1 million yen each for adults and by 2 million yen for each child and pregnant woman to pay for emotional distress over a two-year period starting from the outbreak of the crisis. It will also urge TEPCO to continue to pay compensation to residents of these cities until their radiation doses decline to pre-disaster levels.

February 22, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Ever hopeful EU

February 21, 2014

EU to relax regulations on Japanese food imports

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140222_01.html

The European Union is preparing to relax regulations on Japanese food imports, except for products from nuclear disaster hit Fukushima Prefecture.

The EU requires radiation checks on food products from Tokyo and 9 other prefectures, mostly in northern Japan. The procedures were implemented following the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Officials at the European Commission, the EU executive body, said on Friday that from April it will no longer require inspections on food products made in Tokyo and adjacent Kanagawa Prefecture.

They also said no inspection will be needed for vegetables and livestock products from places other than Fukushima.

But the EU will newly require checks on mushrooms and bamboo shoots produced in Akita and Yamagata Prefectures.

The new rules are expected to take effect on April 1st after being approved by the commission.
Feb. 21, 2014 - Updated 20:47 UTC

No-go order to be lifted in Tamura

February 24, 2014

No-go advisory to be lifted in part of Tamura

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/02/24/national/no-go-advisory-to-be-lifted-in-part-of-tamura/#.Uwt2zIXrV1s>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – An evacuation advisory issued after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns in March 2011 will likely be lifted April 1 in part of the city of Tamura.

The government explained plans for lifting the advisory in the Miyakoji district at a meeting with its residents on Sunday.

The Miyakoji district was part of the former no-go zone set 20 km away from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which was crippled by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

It will be the first time for the evacuation advisory to be lifted completely in any part of the zone. Residents from the Miyakoji district will be able to return home permanently once it is removed.

The government headquarters for the nuclear disaster will make a final decision on the advisory by March 31. Its decontamination efforts in the district were completed last June.

The government decided to lift the advisory after Tepco's compensation program for residents there and measures to help them rebuild their lives were worked out in December.

As of the end of 2013, 358 people representing 117 households were registered as residents in the Miyakoji district. According to a survey by the government and other parties, 44 percent of the residents intend to return.

Sunday's meeting was attended by Kazuyoshi Akaba, state minister of economy, trade and industry, and other government officials, as well as Tamura Mayor Yukei Tomitsuka.

The government explained steps to be taken ahead of the residents' return, including the restoration of commercial and medical facilities. The government also briefed residents about plans to lend out dosimeters to help them monitor their health conditions.

Some of the residents repeated their desire for the evacuation advisory to be lifted early, while others demanding another round of decontamination opposed it.

In April 2012, the Miyakoji district's no-go zone status was changed to one permitting daytime visitation and preparations for removal of the evacuation advisory. Last October, the government presented plans to lift the advisory on Nov. 1. At the time, however, many residents were opposed due to persistent concerns about radioactive fallout, leading the government to withdraw the plan.

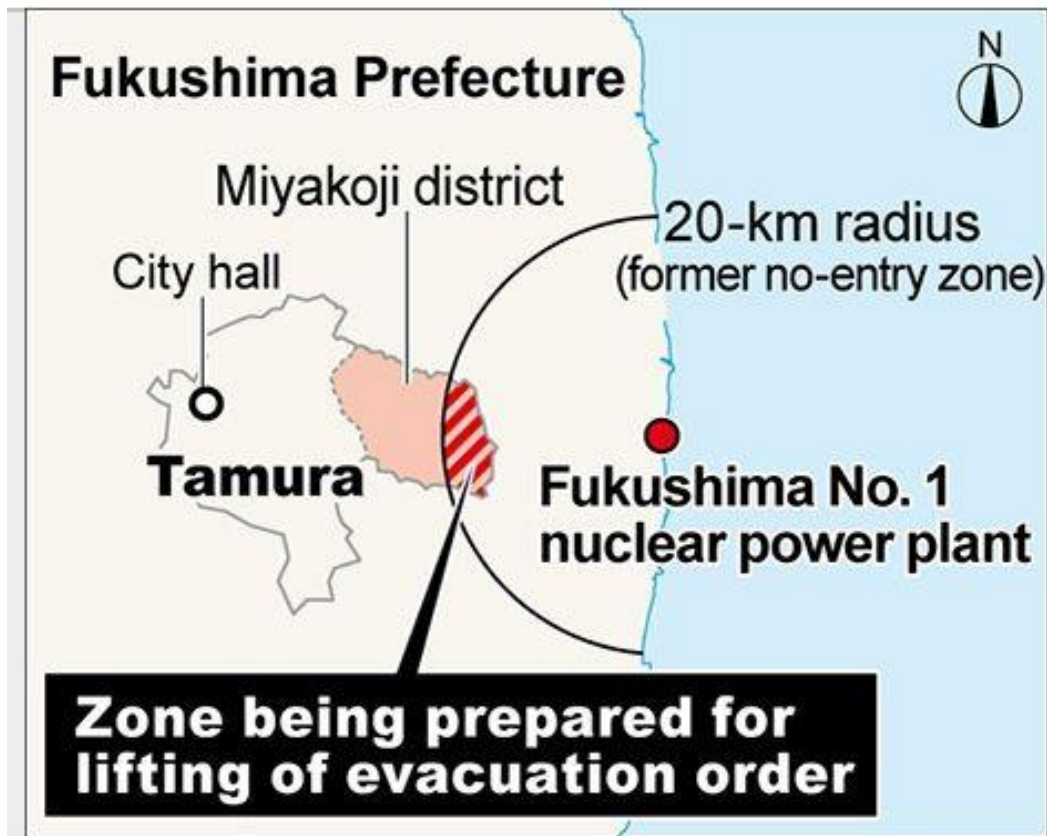
Among other Fukushima areas included in the former no-go zones, preparations to lift the evacuation advisory are expected to fully start in the village of Kawauchi and the town of Naraha. Decontamination work is nearly complete in Kawauchi and is expected to finish at the end of March in Naraha.

Gov't cannot carry out another cleanup for the whole area

February 24, 2014

Government to lift Fukushima evacuation order for 1st time

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402240061>



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

For the first time since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant three years ago, the government is lifting an evacuation order in a restricted area, allowing residents to return to their homes.

Residents of an eastern strip of the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, are being allowed to return as of April 1, the first day of the 2014 fiscal year, government officials said at a meeting Feb. 23. The area lies within 20 kilometers west of where the accident occurred.

One reason the government is rushing to lift evacuation orders for communities affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster is cost. Tokyo Electric Power Co., which is being lent money by the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund to compensate evacuees, is required to continue compensation one year after an evacuation order is lifted. Lifting the orders will hasten the end of those payments.

According to the industry ministry, 1.5 trillion yen (\$14.63 billion) has been paid in compensation to evacuees from 11 municipalities as of February.

In addition, decontamination costs will snowball if the government tries to achieve its long-term goal of lowering annual airborne radiation doses to 1 millisievert or less in areas where evacuation orders are in place.

A Reconstruction Agency official said it is unclear whether the long-term goal can be achieved even if the government continues decontamination work.

Prior to the Feb. 23 meeting, a senior Reconstruction Agency official asked Kazuyoshi Akaba, a senior vice industry minister, to explain the government's policy to evacuees "even if it means rising to your full height and standing firm before residents."

Akaba and Tamura Mayor Yukei Tomitsuka were tasked with explaining the new policy to the residents.

During a previous meeting in October, Tomitsuka had proposed lifting the evacuation order by November, but residents complained, saying too much contamination remained.

Some evacuees requested additional decontamination work because the radiation levels remained above 1 millisievert in some areas. The government promised to deal with residents who are still worried about high radiation levels on a case-by-case basis.

"If this abnormal situation continues, residents will lose attachment to their hometown and the community will collapse," Tomitsuka has said.

Takumi Nemoto, minister for reconstruction, has described fiscal 2014 as "the year in which Fukushima will make big moves," voicing hope evacuees will begin returning to their homes.

The government's determination to lift the evacuation order for the Miyakoji district in the spring is an attempt to get the entire ball rolling.

Six other municipalities are considering lifting evacuation orders over the coming two years or so. That will affect nearly 30,000 evacuees who will have to decide whether they will return or not.

One strategy the government has proposed to facilitate the return to the Miyakoji district is to open key prefectural roads and convenience stores as a way to improve living conditions there.

“If we fail to gain an understanding after doing this much, it will be impossible to lift the evacuation order,” a senior Reconstruction Agency official said.

About 3,000 people left the Miyakoji district in the eastern part of Tamura after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The eastern tip of the Miyakoji district, which lies within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, is designated as a zone that is being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order. It was home to 360 people at the time of the accident.

In June, government-led decontamination work was completed in this strip. Since the summer, residents have been allowed to stay in their homes for more than a month to prepare for their eventual permanent return.

In a 2012 survey, 6.7 percent of Tamura residents said they wanted to return to their homes and 34.5 percent said they wanted to return if some conditions were met.

In the five of six other municipalities, 20 to 40 percent of residents responded in a similar manner. Three of the municipalities are considering lifting evacuation orders as early as this spring.

Evacuation order for Fukushima nuclear disaster-hit district to be lifted in April

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140224p2a00m0na015000c.html>

(Mainichi)

拡大写真

TAMURA, Fukushima -- The central government decided Feb. 23 to lift on April 1 the evacuation order imposed on this city's Miyakoji district in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns in 2011, government officials said.

The district will be the first among 11 cities, towns and villages within a 20-kilometer radius of the stricken nuclear power plant to have its evacuation order lifted.

The government will formalize the decision at a meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters. The decision will allow Miyakoji residents to return to the district permanently a little over three years after the nuclear crisis was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The central and the Tamura municipal governments held a joint briefing for Tamura residents on Feb. 23 to explain the impending decision. Kazuyoshi Akaba, head of the local office of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters and State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Tamura Mayor Yukei Tomitsuka and other officials attended the briefing.

The some 100 Tamura residents at the meeting were about equally divided on the prospect of having the evacuation order lifted, but Akaba explained the impending decision by saying, "The government does not have the right to delay the reconstruction of your life."

He went on to tell the residents that radiation levels have dropped sufficiently due to the completion of decontamination work, and that infrastructure such as expressways had been restored. The government decided to lift the evacuation order on April 1 because the district has met conditions for lifting evacuation orders, including a local annual radiation dose below 20 millisieverts, completion of lifeline infrastructure and sufficient consultation with local authorities.

Eastern Miyakoji, home to 358 people in 117 households, was designated a no-go zone because it was within 20 kilometers of the nuclear power plant. In April 2012, it was designated as a district subject to a possible lifting of the evacuation order with annual radiation exposure of 20 millisieverts or less. But residents were not permitted to spend nights in their homes.

Decontamination work in the district was conducted under central governmental supervision from July 2012 to June 2013. The government implemented a long-stay program in August-October 2013 to allow residents to repair their houses and other essential purposes. The government proposed lifting the evacuation order on Nov. 1 last year but residents balked, saying there were still places with high radiation doses.

Evacuation orders in Fukushima Prefecture have been divided into three categories depending on radiation levels -- no-go zones (annual radiation levels of 50 millisieverts and over), domicile restriction zones (annual radiation levels of between over 20 millisieverts to 50 millisieverts) and zones subject to possible lifting of evacuation orders -- in the 11 municipalities. About 80,000 residents of those cities, towns and villages have evacuated to other parts of Fukushima and elsewhere in Japan.

February 24, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Part of Fukushima evacuation order to end in April

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140224_19.html

The Japanese government plans to lift the evacuation order on an area around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in April.

It will be the first time residents will be allowed to return to live inside the no-entry zone. The zone was drawn up soon after the nuclear accident in March 2011.

The order will be lifted on April 1st for a part of Miyakoji district in Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture. The area is located within a 20-kilometer radius of the plant.

Senior vice economy and industry minister Kazuyoshi Akaba announced the plan at a meeting held on Sunday with district residents.

Akaba told reporters after the meeting that an evacuation order restricts the right of residence guaranteed under the Constitution. He said the government has seriously considered the many people waiting to start their lives over.

The central government and Tamura City initially proposed a plan to lift the evacuation order in November last year. The government finished its cleanup operation for the district at this time.

But they reconsidered after facing opposition from residents concerned about high radiation levels in some parts.

The government says it cannot carry out another cleanup operation for the whole area. But it promised to discuss additional cleanup based on requests from individual residents.

Feb. 24, 2014 - Updated 07:18 UTC

Shortage of workers and building materials

February 23, 2014

Land acquisition delays, rise in material costs slow reconstruction spending in Tohoku

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140223p2a00m0na008000c.html>

While the government has set a 25-trillion-yen budget for reconstruction projects in the disaster-devastated Tohoku region, reconstruction spending has been slow due to delays in land acquisition for moving residential areas to elevated ground as well as an increase in labor and material costs.

The government plans to spend around 25 trillion yen through fiscal 2015 for disaster reconstruction. However, only about 60 percent of the budget for fiscal 2011 and 65 percent of the budget for fiscal 2012 were actually used. The remaining funds were carried over to the budget for the following fiscal year or allocated to the supplementary budget of the year's general account.

Although the government had planned to carry out a large proportion of reconstruction projects in fiscal 2011 and 2012, the total amount of spending during the period hovered at around 15.3 trillion yen.

The Reconstruction Agency explained that the projects have fallen behind schedule because of delays in buying land plots, which are planned to be used for residential areas and storing debris. Of 2.2 trillion yen that went unspent in fiscal 2012 and was carried over to the next fiscal year, 381 billion yen had been allocated for debris disposal and another 277.7 billion yen for the cost of developing areas for housing on higher ground.

There are a total of 332 districts that need to be redeveloped on higher ground for residents in the Tohoku region, and as of the end of September last year, land development had started in only 170 districts. The process has been slow because municipal governments have been struggling to identify the owners of candidate sites. In Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, inheritance procedures were never carried out for a plot of land whose last owner died in the Meiji period, and now dozens of relatives of the late owner qualify as legal successors. In this case, the Ofunato municipal government decided against acquisition of the site because gaining consent from all of the inheritors would take too much time.

To speed up the land acquisition process, the agency introduced a new system in October last year that allows third-party custodians such as lawyers to appeal to family courts for permission to buy and sell land whose owners cannot be identified. Agency officials said the new system would cut back on the time required to purchase land from six months to as little as three weeks.

Meanwhile, a series of unsuccessful bids for public-works contracts has also slowed down reconstruction projects. According to the Board of Audit of Japan, 21 percent of bids for public-works projects in Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures that had a target price of 10 million yen and up have been unsuccessful due to the minimum bid price exceeding the target price, among other reasons. This is attributed to a shortage of workers and building materials in the three prefectures. Labor costs in the region doubled in the past year and the price of liquid concrete has surged by 1.6 times that of pre-disaster prices.

As a result, the rate of unsuccessful public-works bids in the region is far above the national average of 3 percent in fiscal 2011 according to a Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry survey. Fukushima Prefecture officials are troubled by the fact that contractors don't even bother to make bids on small contracts -- with target prices set at 30 million yen or lower -- or on complicated projects.

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism plans to begin operating a liquid concrete factory just for the construction of a road that is planned between Aomori and Miyagi prefectures to stop

concrete prices from rising further. Officials plan to bring materials for making concrete from the Kanto region and other areas to the factory.

Meanwhile, full-scale construction work in preparation for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics is set to start in the Tokyo metropolitan area. A senior official of the agency expressed concerns over manpower shortages becoming even more severe in the Tohoku region if more workers choose to head to the metropolitan area for job opportunities.

February 23, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

TEPCO to ignore Gov't guidelines on compensation

February 25, 2014

TEPCO to bypass guidelines, end compensation for Fukushima evacuee incomes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402250046>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Bypassing government guidelines, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said it will end compensation payments next February to people whose incomes have fallen because of the Fukushima nuclear accident

The operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant announced its decision on Feb. 24, citing an "improvement in the employment climate."

But the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, a governmental body that sets guidelines for compensation to nuclear disaster victims, has not decided when to terminate reparations.

"We may not abide by the guidelines, but considering the particularity of the accident, we have sufficiently extended the indemnity period," a TEPCO official said.

The utility has paid compensation through the end of this month to cover reduced incomes of residents in evacuation zones who lost or changed their jobs because of the nuclear accident triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

According to TEPCO officials, the company will pay its final reparation for income decreases for the period through February next year, and it will not prolong the basic compensation term.

This plan goes against the government committee's guidelines, which state that “it will be reasonable to end compensation when residents become able to do business on a level equivalent to that before the disaster.”

When the committee compiled additional guidelines in December, it decided to allow TEPCO to stop paying compensation for emotional distress a year after evacuation orders are lifted. That decision was made on the assumption that the utility would continue providing compensation for decreases in income.

The TEPCO officials also said that the utility for up to one year will cover the differences between current incomes and those after evacuees return to their homes within a year after the government lifts the evacuation orders.

February 25, 2014

Fukushima fighting fear of radiation in food

February 25, 2014

Fukushima takes new approach to ease fears of radiation in food

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402250007>

By KEIICHIRO INOUE/ Staff Writer

Fukushima Prefecture is spending about 1.7 billion yen (\$16.6 million) this fiscal year to fight rumors about radiation from the stricken nuclear plant that have led to plummeting prices and sales of farm products.

The budget is a fourfold increase over the previous year, and the campaign is focused more on trial-and-error attempts at informing consumers of “Fukushima after the calamity” through Tokyo-area media.

Fears of radiation remain nearly three years since the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Last year, prices for Fukushima agricultural produce in the Tokyo market did not return to levels seen before the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown at the plant.

“We would like people to forget about the radioactivity over time, but (now) we are plagued by the lingering impression of ‘contaminated Fukushima produce,’” the prefecture’s agricultural product distribution division said in a statement.

In 2012, the prefecture hired popular idol group Tokio for commercials to appeal its agricultural produce.

This fiscal year, it conducted a survey of before-and-after results from the commercials, primarily in the Tokyo area.

The ratio of respondents who said they “do not want to buy” Fukushima produce dropped by about 10 points from 27 percent after viewing.

Since June last year, Fukushima Prefecture has invited the Tokyo-area media to join seminars and tours on cucumbers, rice and "anpogaki" dried persimmons. Around 260 journalists have participated.

Thirty-seven media members mainly from Tokyo gathered at JR Fukushima Station on the morning of Dec. 11 to board a bus arranged by the prefectural government.

They took a tour of an area where persimmons are grown. The dried persimmons are a local specialty that the area has begun shipping to market for the first time in three years.

Mikio Matsuura, a 68-year-old persimmon farmer, greeted the reporters at a drying area in the town of Kunimi. He said he is happy about shipping his produce again but is worried about the market’s reaction.

Matsuura explained that all his produce is tested for radiation and he only ships fruit whose safety is verified.

“I ask for your help in giving consumers information,” he told the reporters.

The reporters also visited a persimmon orchard and fruit-sorting center in the neighboring city of Date, where they were shown decontamination measures being taken and how the produce is tested.

The prefectural government and the local agricultural cooperative associations felt a heightened sense of crisis two years ago over price trends in Tokyo's wholesale market.

In 2012, prices of Fukushima produce fell by more than the average in other farming areas, exemplified by a roughly 10-percent drop in cucumbers, the prefecture's mainstay crop.

Fukushima Prefecture contracted ppc Inc., a Tokyo publicity agency, to formulate a "media exposure strategy."

The company collects and analyzes relevant news stories from five national and four regional newspapers. It has also individually asked 40 reporters for advice on how to disseminate information.

The reporters advised against only emphasizing safety. They proposed explaining the positives and negatives about life on the farm and suggested that it would be easy to make a TV show or a news story packaged with sightseeing information.

"We are beginning to know what kind of information we are expected to release," Keisuke Sasaki, 44, of the publicity agency said.

There were 468 news articles about Fukushima-grown agricultural products from April to December 2013, an increase from the 380 articles during the same period the previous year. The content had also grown more positive.

"Our measures have yielded a certain amount of results," a prefectural government official said.

Fukushima Prefecture plans to devote efforts to media-related measures next fiscal year, which will start on April 1.

In a 2013 questionnaire conducted by the Consumer Affairs Agency, more than 20 percent of respondents said they still "want to buy food products that do not contain radioactive substances."

Mixed feelings about lifting evacuation order

February 25, 2014

Residents both relieved and worried as decision made to lift nuclear evacuation order

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140224p2a00m0na013000c.html>
TAMURA, Fukushima -- Residents attending a Feb. 23 briefing on a government decision to lift an evacuation order here showed a mixture of relief and worry.

The decision, made the same day, will on April 1 lift an evacuation order covering the Miyakoji district of the Fukushima Prefecture city of Tamura, imposed after the March 2011 triple-meltdown at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear plant. The briefing, held by officials from the national and municipal governments, was attended by around 100 people.

Kazuyoshi Akaba, head of the local office of the government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, said, "The evacuation order interferes with the freedom to choose one's place of residence guaranteed by the Constitution. For those who want to resume planting rice and repair their homes, the government does not have the right to delay the reconstruction of their lives."

Akaba said that the government will give across-the-board support to those who choose to return to their homes, adding that whether evacuees decide to return or not is up to them.

Kazuo Endo, a 65-year-old resident whose home is in a part of Miyakoji district with comparatively low radiation levels, acted as representative of the residents at the briefing.

"Without the evacuation order being lifted, home renovation businesses won't come back," he said in support of a quick lifting of the evacuation order. He was followed by several calls from others for resumption of farming and measures to combat damage from unfounded rumors about local products being contaminated with radioactive substances.

While only three farming households resumed commercial farming in the district last year, more than 10 are expected to do so this year. Residents involved in farming, commerce and industry showed particular enthusiasm at the briefing about returning to the district.

Meanwhile, Hideyuki Tsuboi, 38, called for decontamination work to be done on a four- to five-meter-high slope by his house. Although decontamination work in residential areas ended in June last year, slopes were exempted over fears the work would cause radioactive materials to escape to other areas, and over concerns for worker safety.

Tsuboi, who has three young daughters, said, "At the last briefing (in October last year), you said that an environment safe for children has been established, but I think you have overlooked some parts of it."

During a temporary return to his home in the Miyakoji district, his children picked up and played with stones in an area he later heard from his family was not yet decontaminated. While his oldest daughter, who is a third-grader in elementary school, may be able to understand if he tells her not to touch the stones, his 3-year-old daughter wouldn't understand and could put them in her mouth, Tsuboi said.

"Before turning the discussion towards lifting the evacuation order, I want you to re-examine the situation from the view of a parent," he added.

When the time limit for staying in his temporary residence runs out in spring next year, Tsuboi plans to move to the city of Fukushima, where his wife's parents live. Although he knows that decontamination work has lowered radiation levels in the Miyakoji district, he wants to be sure his children are safe.

The briefing ended after about three hours. The expressions of those leaving varied, in testament to the complexity of the situation.

Futaba: Isolation & desolation

February 25, 2014

In shadow of Fukushima nuclear plant, a town withers away

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402260048>



Documents and other files are scattered on the first floor of the Futaba town office in Fukushima Prefecture on Feb. 25. (Satoru Ogawa)

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

FUTABA, Fukushima Prefecture--A calendar showing March 2011 still hangs on a wall, while a clock suspended from the ceiling remains stuck at 2:50. Documents and other files are scattered on the floor around desks and shelves. Potted plants withered and died long ago.

Outside, on the rooftop of the Futaba town office, one can clearly see the isolation and desolation of this dying town where time has stopped.

For the first time since the aftermath of March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, an Asahi Shimbun reporter entered the town office of Futaba on Feb. 25.

All 6,400 residents have fled the town.

A notice pasted on the interior of the front entrance, underlined in red, reads: "Since this office is located within 10 kilometers of the nuclear plant, you have to stay indoors. Please don't go outside."

On the second floor, sheets of paper pasted on a board show information that Tokyo Electric Power Co. released about conditions at the nuclear plant.

“The pressure in the containment vessel has risen abnormally,” reads information that arrived before dawn on March 12, 2011.

Futaba officials evacuated the town office on the central government's orders that day, a day after the disaster started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

About 96 percent of Futaba, including areas around the town office, has been designated a difficult-to-return zone because annual accumulated radiation levels exceed 50 millisieverts.

The zone is surrounded by barricades, making it impossible for people to enter freely.

Wearing a mask and a white protective gear that covered my entire body and carrying a dosimeter, I entered Futaba after obtaining permission from the town office. A town official, who guided me around Futaba, wore similar clothing.

After leaving the town office, we headed to the Nagatsuka district in the central part of Futaba, where there were no signs of residents.

Trucks for decontamination work, passenger cars and the cawing of crows sometimes broke the silence.

A damaged shutter rattled as it was hit by the wind. A house that collapsed in the shaking of Great East Japan Earthquake covered part of the road. The Shohatsujinja shrine on the opposite side of the house was tilted, and a 3-meter-high stone monument remained toppled and snapped in the middle.

“My classmate was the chief priest of this shrine. I held (traditional) ‘shichigosan’ festivals for my daughter in this shrine. I also held purification rituals for my car here,” said my guide, Kunihiro Hiraiwa, 52, head of the town office’s public relations section.

When the magnitude-9.0 earthquake struck on March 11, 2011, Hiraiwa headed a team in charge of issues related to the nuclear power plant. His duties included applying for central government grants for the town’s hosting of a nuclear power plant.

He was also the person who received information from TEPCO when problems occurred at the plant.

“TEPCO had said, ‘The nuclear power plant is absolutely safe.’ We had never imagined that such a disastrous situation like this would arise,” Hiraiwa said, looking at an empty street.

The Futaba swimming beach was crowded with about 85,000 people in 2010. The seaside facility operated by the town office was damaged by the 2011 tsunami.

From a higher floor of the facility, we could see the Pacific Ocean extend to the horizon and gentle waves hitting the beach.

Radiation levels are relatively low in the northeastern part of Futaba, and the area was designated a zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order in May 2013.

Peering over the barricade, however, we saw withered grass at places where houses were washed away by the tsunami. Infrastructure improvements and decontamination work have not made progress.

Hiraiwa’s house is located in the area.

“Nothing has changed (since May 2013),” he said.

February 25, 2014

Fishermen anxious

February 28, 2014

Fisheries group asks for swift probe into leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140228_30.html

A fishermen's federation in Japan says the latest spill of 100 tons of contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has raised deep concern among local fishermen.

National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations Chairman Hiroshi Kishi submitted a written

request to industry ministry senior vice minister Kazuyoshi Akaba on Friday.

Fishermen are urging the ministry to swiftly investigate into the cause of the serious incident.

They're also asking it to ensure a full recovery of spilled water, step up monitoring of the effects on seawater and seafood, and provide full information.

Akaba said it's deplorable that the leak was caused by human error, and pledged efforts to prevent a recurrence.

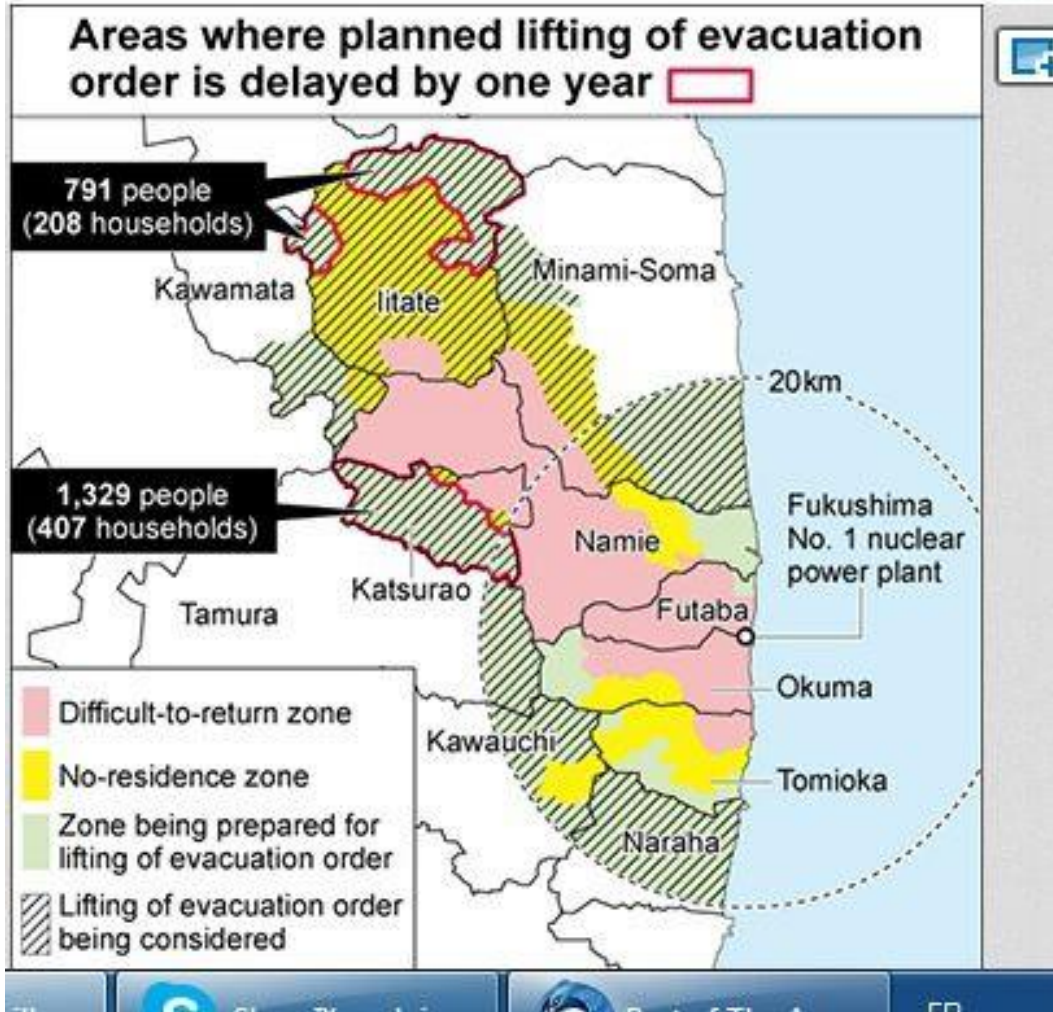
Tokyo Electric Power Company says someone may have caused the contaminated water to overflow to the ground by leaving tank valves open.

Feb. 28, 2014 - Updated 06:32 UTC

Lifting evacuation order delayed in Katsurao and Iitate

Fukushima villages face 1-year delay in lifting of evacuation orders

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402280073>



By ASAKO MYORAKU/ Staff Writer

Citing delays in decontamination work, the government has decided to extend evacuation orders by one year for two villages near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, sources said.

The government initially planned to lift the orders in “zones being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order” in Katsurao and Iitate in March, three years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear accident.

But the government’s local nuclear emergency response headquarters will set March 2015 as the new target date, the sources said.

Areas with this designation have annual radiation doses of 20 millisieverts or less.

The delay in lifting the evacuation orders could cause more evacuees to lose their desire to return home. The villages may also have to reconsider their rehabilitation plans, and the recovery of services necessary for the people's daily lives may stall.

Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. will have to provide more compensation payments for evacuees. The redress period continues for one year after an evacuation order is lifted.

In Katsurao, the zone facing the delay was home to 1,329 people from 407 households, while 791 people from 208 households used to live in the zone in Iitate.

Target dates for two other evacuation zones remain unchanged. In the two villages, evacuation orders are expected to be lifted for "no-residence zones," with annual doses between 20 and 50 millisieverts, in March 2016, and for "difficult-to-return zones," with annual doses exceeding 50 millisieverts, in March 2017.

Other municipalities where government-led decontamination work has been behind schedule may also have their target dates pushed back.

The local nuclear emergency response headquarters has set target dates for lifting evacuation orders in Minami-Soma city, as well as the towns of Tomioka, Namie, Futaba and Okuma, based on plans for infrastructure recovery and decontamination work.

Tomioka, located south of the crippled plant, is calling on the government to review the targets based on realistic assessments.

"We hope to draw up a town development plan for the future, but target dates are based on shaky grounds and have lost substance," a senior town official said.

The government said Feb. 23 an evacuation order for the eastern tip of Tamura's Miyakoji district will be lifted April 1, the first lifting of an evacuation order since the Fukushima nuclear accident started.

Delay likely in lifting of evacuation order

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140228_35.html

Japan's government is likely to delay for a year the lifting of an evacuation order for areas in 2 villages near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The government had said the order for Katsurao and Iitate villages would be lifted in March, 3 years after the nuclear accident. But progress has been slow in work to remove radioactive materials and rebuild infrastructure.

A delay would affect about 2,000 households.

The government has set prospective dates for lifting such evacuation orders as a yardstick for compensation to evacuees. A delay would mean higher payments to affected households.

Officials say they will consult the villages and residents to set a new prospective date for lifting the order for their communities.

On Sunday, the government announced a plan to lift an evacuation order for a community in Tamura City on April 1st after decontamination work is completed.

If the plan becomes official, the move would be the first of its kind since the accident.
Feb. 28, 2014 - Updated 08:56 UTC

Fukushima's despair

March 1, 2014

Fukushima's appalling death toll

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/03/01/editorials/fukushimas-appalling-death-toll/#.UxIXIYXrV1s>

As the third anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake approaches, new studies of the ongoing effects of the triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown show that the disaster is far from over.

The latest report from Fukushima revealed that more people have died from stress-related illnesses and other maladies after the disaster than from injuries directly linked to the disaster. The report compiled by prefectural authorities and local police found that the deaths of 1,656 people in Fukushima Prefecture fall into the former category.

That figure surpasses the 1,607 people who died from disaster-related injuries. Another 434 people have died since 3/11 in Iwate Prefecture and 879 in Miyagi Prefecture. These indirect causes are just as deadly as the direct causes, and are likely to last much longer unless the central government takes action.

In another report, the first of its kind since the disaster, the lifetime risk of cancer for young children was found to have increased because of exposure to radiation. While the increase was relatively small — a mere 1.06 percent in areas close to the crippled nuclear plant — the results, which were published in the U.S. science journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, were the first projections of the harmful effects from exposure to radiation released by the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant.

These two reports both show that despite the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s claims that things are under control, the disaster continues to threaten the lives and well-being of people in the hardest hit areas of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures.

The reports highlight the fact that much of the problem stems from the government's poor handling of the after-effects of the disaster and Tepco's continuing inept handling of the cleanup at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The health ministry has insisted that the possibility of indirectly caused deaths diminished one month after the earthquake. However, these reports show that the health ministry is in denial about the existence of problems and is resistant to finding ways to address problems survivors are still suffering.

The ministry should find ways to support hospitals, social workers and local government employees who are trying to step up watch over evacuated residents still living in temporary housing and others still at risk for stress-related problems.

Helping people in the affected areas should not be relegated to a lower priority because other issues come up.

The central and Tokyo metropolitan governments, in their push to win the 2020 Olympics for Tokyo, stressed the unique Japanese cultural sense of *omotenashi*, or hospitality. But according to the prefectural report, 136,000 people are still displaced from their houses and towns due to the triple-disaster.

Surely those displaced people should receive traditional Japanese hospitality in the form of new homes and rebuilt communities.

Perhaps as each large-scale Olympic project is started in Tokyo, one new permanent housing for displaced residents in Fukushima could be built.

The Olympics in Sochi highlighted the many inequalities and problems in Russian society. Surely the central government in Japan would not want to have foreign journalists contrasting the wonderful conditions for athletes in Tokyo with residents still living in temporary housing and struggling in tough conditions in Fukushima and other areas.

One of the worst continued effects of the disaster is how much stress continues to harm people. The level of stress may be reaching a threshold, as happened in Kobe after the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, where alcoholism and other problems worsened several years later.

The Fukushima Center for Disaster Mental Health found that consultations for emotional instability, such as irritation, depression and mood swings, increased 50 percent from the 2012, forming 19 percent of total health consultations. The effects of stress may be delayed, but they are no less severe and need just as much attention and care.

The area needs more such mental health care centers and professionals. So far, the centers have largely been formed and directed by the Fukushima prefectural government.

However, the central government, along with Tepco, should provide more financial support so that health care workers can go out to check on the 136,000 people who are still displaced.

Volunteers helped considerably in the immediate aftermath of the 3/11 disaster, and the need for professional help for survivors in Fukushima Prefecture continues.

Issues of financial compensation for individuals are extremely complex and take time to go through legal channels. Money problems also add to the level of stress. The government and Tepco could work to speed up the process of compensation. That's especially important considering that about 90 percent of those who have died since the initial 3/11 toll were at least 66 years old.

In so doing, they would considerably lower the stress on people still living in temporary housing or in difficult conditions.

The third anniversary of the disaster is March 11. Anti-nuclear groups have already planned mass rallies against nuclear power on March 9.

There is still much left to protest about. Included on the long agenda of Fukushima disaster-related problems that still need to be dealt with should be improving the lives of disaster victims.

Incense sticks for memory

March 01, 2014

Students send handmade incense sticks for 3/11 service in Kamaishi

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201403010012>

By MASAYUKI SHIRAISHI/ Staff Writer

SAKAI, Osaka Prefecture--Using bark from the official tree of Kamaishi, night students at Sakai Technical High School have made "senko" incense sticks, to be used at the upcoming memorial service to commemorate the third anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture.

Kamaishi was devastated by the tsunami that followed the massive earthquake on March 11, 2011. One of the ingredients used in the incense project was the bark of "tabunoki" (*machilus thunbergii*), Kamaishi's official tree.

"We have put our will to continue to support the disaster-hit areas in the character 'kizuna' (bond)," said Mitsunori Yasuda, a teacher of the school's special studies classes that undertook the effort. "I would be grateful if the senko, which students put their hearts into, can offer silent support to the people in the disaster areas."

On Feb. 22, about a dozen students and a teacher gathered at Okuno Seimeido, a well-established senko manufacturer and distributor in the city, to pack what they had made, after repeated failures, into a wooden box.

"I hope our senko will help comfort people in the disaster-stricken area," said student leader Yuya Kawata, 18.

Words inscribed on the paulownia container were kizuna and "Kamaishi×Sakai."

According to Yasuda, the school started offering practical training classes in making and selling knives and senko, traditional crafts in Sakai. Part of the profits from the special studies classes has been donated to disaster victims overseas.

When the 2011 earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan, Sakai Technical High students voiced their desires to do something for the stricken areas.

They made incense sticks, using as ingredients for the scent official city flowers of Kamaishi, Tono and Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture and Kesenuma in Miyagi Prefecture, and sold them in Sakai and donated profits from the sales to earthquake and tsunami victims.

Hiroshi Okuno, president of Okuno Seimeido, instructed the students in senko-making techniques.

When Yasuda and Okuno met with Kamaishi Mayor Takenori Noda during visits to the disaster-stricken areas last year, they were asked about the basic ingredients of senko.

When Okuno replied they were made from tabunoki, Noda said, "Tabunoki is Kamaishi's city tree. I want your students to make senko using the wood."

In autumn, the high school received a package of tabunoki bark from Kamaishi.

According to Okuno, the bark is dried and made into a powder before being blended with different scent essences such as musk and sandalwood. It is then kneaded into a clay form.

The mixture is rolled and made into sticks and cut to the proper length.

The students worked through this process before their senko were sent to Okuno's factory to be dried and finished.

Stick incenses enough for 800 people were completed.

Among fragrance essences used was the "hamayuri" beach lily, which is Kamaishi's city flower.

Each of the paulownia boxes bears a student's message, such as "May your heart always be warm and at peace."

The boxes will be provided to memorial service participants free of charge.

By MASAYUKI SHIRAISHI/ Staff Writer

Depressed

March 1, 2014

Depression hits 7% of Miyagi coastal residents, 3 times nat'l average

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140301p2g00m0dm047000c.html>

SENDAI (Kyodo) -- A study of more than 3,700 adults in coastal communities in Miyagi Prefecture has shown just over 7 percent may be having depression or strong anxiety, while 5 percent are suspected to have post-traumatic stress disorder due to the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, according to Tohoku University.

The depression rate in Ishinomaki and six other coastal municipalities in the study released Thursday was three times higher than the average registered in a national survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2004.

The university said experiences of extreme situations and the deaths of relatives in the disaster are possible reasons behind the high rate of the psychological suffering.

Miyagi suffered the highest casualty among Japan's prefectures in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake, accounting for 9,537 of the 15,884 confirmed deaths, according to a National Police Agency survey as of Feb. 10.

The mental health study was conducted as part of a general health survey project being undertaken by Tohoku University and Iwate Medical University on a total of 150,000 people, mostly those affected by the disaster.

The latest result of mental health is based on an advance analysis of 3,744 people who responded to questionnaires when they underwent health checkups offered by municipal governments.

Hiroaki Tomita, disaster psychiatry professor who conducted the study, said, "Potentially, a higher proportion of people may be psychologically ill."

Suspected PTSD patients were estimated from the ratio of people who said they have painful memories of the disaster and experience difficulty in leading everyday life.

Depression and other psychological anomalies were checked using scores-based evaluations about mental health.

"It highlights the need for mental care," Tomita said of the study. "We hope to conduct further research to provide sufficient support."

March 01, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

February 28, 2014

Depression a serious problem in disaster-hit areas

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140228_11.html

Depression among those who experienced the 2011 disaster in northeastern Japan appears to be a serious problem.

A survey has found about one in 4 residents in the regions of Miyagi Prefecture hit by the March 11th earthquake and tsunami shows symptoms of depression.

A project launched by a Tohoku University team has surveyed 3,744 residents in 6 municipalities in the prefecture since last May. The municipalities include Ishinomaki and Higashi-Matsushima.

Of the residents interviewed, 27 percent had symptoms of depression, including bleak moods.

Five percent reported that painful memories of the disaster were affecting their daily activities.

This includes reduced levels of concentration. Experts say these residents could be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

Professor Hiroaki Tomita in charge of the project at Tohoku University explained the survey was conducted during health checkups by the municipalities and the respondents are believed to be health-conscious.

He said a higher percentage of people could be suffering from depression if the survey included those who do not come for checkups.

Tohoku University and other organizations will continue to provide telephone counseling by clinical psycho-therapists to people with symptoms of depression. It will also involve specialized medical institutions to help combat the problem.

Feb. 28, 2014 - Updated 00:09 UTC

"Join hands, share lessons and face challenges"

March 2, 2014

Student visits bombed Marshall Islands to find way for Fukushima revival

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201403020019

By HAJIMU TAKEDA/ Staff Writer

MAJURO, Marshall Islands--A student displaced by the Fukushima nuclear disaster is visiting the Pacific islands victimized by U.S. nuclear bomb testing decades ago to learn what she can do to rebuild Fukushima.

Keiko Takahashi evacuated her home, four kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, on March 12, 2011, a day after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered what would become the nation's worst nuclear accident.

The 21-year-old, a junior at Fukushima University, entered Majuro, capital of the Marshall Islands, on Feb. 24 as people recalled the tragic consequences of a U.S. hydrogen device detonated on March 1, 1954.

About 100 people, including Matashichi Oishi, a crew member of the Daigo Fukuryu Maru tuna fishing boat exposed to fallout from the blast at Bikini Atoll, prayed for a nuclear-free world at a ceremony in Majuro on March 1.

"The leaders of nations that took a toll on many lives to produce nuclear weapons must reflect on what they did and compensate the victims," the 80-year-old Oishi said.

Takahashi's home was in Okuma, a town in Fukushima Prefecture that co-hosts the crippled nuclear plant. Her high school classmates, evacuating around the nation, said they could not--and did not want to--return to Okuma.

Takahashi was able to visit her home only once since she fled, but she believes that she can never abandon her hometown. She worried that local culture, as well as residents' pride in the town, might be lost.

Around that time, she met with Hiroko Aihara, 46, a freelance journalist based in Fukushima. Aihara suggested that Takahashi visit the Marshall Islands with her.

Islanders who were forced to flee due to the U.S. nuclear bomb testing in the late 1940s through the late 1950s have been unable to return for decades due to the unfinished decontamination work there.

The more Takahashi studied about the Pacific islands, the more she wanted to see the “scars” left by the nuclear tests as a member of a generation tasked with rehabilitating Fukushima.

Some of the people Takahashi interviewed in Majuro have lost their desire to return to the islands where they used to live. But others have maintained the traditional outrigger canoes handed down on their islands.

“A clue to achieving a nuclear-free world will be found when people who suffered damage join hands, share lessons and face challenges,” Takahashi said.

March 1, 2014

A third of Fukushima children suffer from PTSD

March 3, 2014

Survey shows 30% of children in disaster areas suffer from PTSD

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201403030006

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

More than 30 percent of children affected by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami suffered from post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), such as a prolonged state of anxiety and insomnia, about nine times more than ordinary children.

A survey was conducted by a health ministry study group about two years after the disaster, covering 198 children in the devastated prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, as well as 82 children in unaffected Mie Prefecture.

The survey results were announced March 1. The children were aged 6 to 8 when the study group, made up of child psychiatrists, interviewed them and their parents.

Nearly 34 percent of the children in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures were suffering from symptoms of PTSD, compared with 3.7 percent in Mie Prefecture.

In the three prefectures, 14 percent said they suffered flashbacks of painful experiences during the disaster or they repeatedly relived such experiences in dreams.

Seventeen percent said they could not remember what they had experienced or stayed away from where they were at the time of the disaster and avoided what they were doing.

Ten percent complained about suffering from insomnia and a heightened state of sensitivity.

“Children’s problems often go unnoticed because they cannot explain their conditions well,” said Takeo Fujiwara, a department director of the National Center for Child Health and Development and a member of the study group. “Experts should help teachers and nursery staff take appropriate steps.”

According to the survey, children tended to suffer from PTSD when they endured more painful experiences, such as the earthquake, tsunami, fire, separation from family and friends, and life in evacuation centers and temporary housing.

Anger at unfairness of compensation system

March 3, 2014

Nuclear redress gap angers Fukushima residents

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140303p2a00m0na013000c.html>

A sense of unfairness is spreading among Fukushima Prefecture residents over different amounts of compensation over the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant meltdowns in 2011. The gap stems from guidelines by the government’s Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, which sets redress according to evacuation zones.

The Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center (ADR) lacks flexibility over the guidelines set by the committee under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and is losing the trust of Fukushima residents.

Some residents are filing suit to seek additional compensation after their compensation has been cut off, but lawsuits themselves are threatening to become a burden on nuclear disaster victims. One expert pointed out the need for a framework for smoothly resolving redress problems.

During a town policy meeting for Tomioka, which was held in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki on Feb. 12, residents expressed their displeasure to senior town officials over unfairness in compensation amounts, asking them to request the central government to limit such gaps to a minimum.

The dispute reconciliation committee last December set new guidelines for compensation for psychological distress among residents from no-go zones (annual radiation levels of over 50 millisieverts), domicile restriction zones (annual radiation levels of between over 20 millisieverts to 50 millisieverts) and zones subject to possible lifting of evacuation orders (annual radiation levels of 20 millisieverts or less). The guidelines also cover land purchases by the residents outside the restricted zones.

A uniform amount of compensation was granted exceptionally to residents of the towns of Okuma and Futaba, which mainly fall in no-go zones. But the town of Tomioka has a mix of the three zones, prompting town residents to complain about different amounts of compensation.

"Most town residents are giving up on returning home. I cannot understand why there are different amounts of compensation," 67-year-old Choichi Watanabe said at the Tomioka town policy meeting. He said his house in the domicile restriction zone is not habitable because the attic has corroded due to a leaky roof and tatami mats have gone moldy.

Kazunori Watanabe, a 40-year-old judicial scrivener who has received inquiries from his fellow Tomioka residents, said, "All town residents evacuated together and have been through a lot. Their pain arising from losing their hometown is the same and compensation should be across the board," he says.

The Tomioka town government has set April 2017 as the earliest date for the return of residents to the zones for domicile restrictions and the possible lifting of evacuation orders. The residents make up 71 percent of the town's population. But a survey in August last year shows that only 12 percent of Tomioka residents want to return home.

Those wishing to return to their homes have to wait for the evacuation order to be lifted. Compensation payments will stop one year after the lifting of the evacuation order. If they do not return home, they have to stay away without any redress.

About 3,900 residents of Hirono had evacuated as of the end of February even after compensation payments to them were cut off. The town saw its emergency evacuation preparatory zone (about 20 to 30 kilometers within the stricken nuclear power plant) lifted in September 2011 and a monthly compensation fee of 100,000 yen to residents in the zone for evacuating their houses was terminated in August 2012. But only about 1,300 of the town's 5,200 residents have returned to their houses.

A Hirono town official said residents in the former emergency evacuation preparatory zone have been dissatisfied with the compensation cutoff because of their inability to smoothly return home due to the absence of a restoration of infrastructure and lifeline services.

The return of residents to the neighboring village of Kawauchi has not progressed much, either. Hirono Mayor Satoshi Endo and Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo on Feb. 5 petitioned the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito to continue compensation payments and to take other measures.

March 03, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Information on Fukushima disaster added to radiation booklets

March 3, 2014

Education ministry revises booklets on radiation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140303_16.html

Japan's education ministry has revised its instructional booklets on radiation by adding details on the impact of Tokyo Electric's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The ministry published the original booklets in October of 2011, about 6 months after the disaster. But many teachers complained that the booklets lacked sufficient information on the accident itself.

The new booklets include maps of the areas affected by radiation from the crippled power plant as well as places from which residents were forced to evacuate.

They also explain the impact of harmful rumors about the disaster on the farming and tourism industries.

The booklets say that some children who had evacuated from Fukushima were bullied in places where they relocated.

Education ministry officials say they hope the materials will provide accurate facts about Fukushima to help school children make the right decisions.

The ministry plans to post the booklets online soon and will start distributing printed copies to schools in April.

Mar. 3, 2014 - Updated 02:56 UTC

Three years later: Disappointment and frustration

March 4, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Frustration remains high over Fukushima cleanup, but radiation fears easing

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201403040053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Eighty-three percent of Fukushima Prefecture residents are disappointed with the handling of radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, while 62 percent feel let down by decontamination efforts, a survey showed.

Although the survey showed signs that radiation fears are easing among Fukushima residents, frustration and distrust of the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the nuclear plant, remain high.

Concerns are also growing in the prefecture that the rest of Japan is losing interest in the nuclear disaster that started on March 11, 2011.

Seventy-seven percent of respondents in the survey said they believe that memories of the nuclear accident have been fading and Japanese citizens have grown less interested in the victims, compared with 19 percent who feel that concerns remain high in the rest of the nation.

In a nationwide opinion poll in February, 69 percent of respondents said memories and concerns have faded, while 27 percent said they have not.

The latest telephone survey on Fukushima Prefecture residents was conducted jointly by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. on March 1-2 ahead of the third anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The survey received valid responses from 1,000 eligible voters in Fukushima Prefecture, or 54 percent of those contacted.

Only 11 percent of residents had words of praise for the central government's overall measures to deal with the nuclear accident, down from 17 percent in an Asahi Shimbun survey taken in March last year. The ratio of residents disappointed with the government's handling of the disaster inched up from 73 percent last year to 74 percent.

In the latest survey, residents were asked for the first time what they thought of the responses of the central government and TEPCO to the continuing leaks of radioactive water at the damaged facility.

Eight percent said they thought highly of the countermeasures, compared with 83 percent who criticized the efforts. Among respondents with children of junior high school age or younger, the disapproval rate was 90 percent, the survey showed.

Efforts by the central and local governments to decontaminate areas around the crippled nuclear plant also failed to impress residents in the prefecture.

Thirty-six percent of respondents expressed high or moderate approval of the decontamination work. However, 62 percent said the efforts do not deserve any positive words.

The central government's long-term goal is to reduce annual radiation dose levels to 1 millisievert in residential areas affected by the nuclear disaster.

According to the survey, 63 percent of respondents believe the government should try to reach this target as soon as possible despite the expected huge costs and time needed for the endeavor. Among women between 30 and 59 years old, 70 to 80 percent said the government should accelerate its efforts.

Twenty-seven percent of respondents said there is no need to rush work related to the safety of living environments.

The government plans to store radioactive debris collected through decontamination work at intermediate facilities installed in Fukushima Prefecture. It has promised to transfer the waste out of Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years.

Only 9 percent of respondents fully or somewhat believe this promise will be kept, compared with 87 percent who partly or absolutely expect this vow to be broken, according to the survey.

Asked whether they believe the prefecture's path for disaster recovery has been cleared, 17 percent said they do to a full or certain extent, while 82 percent said they fully or partially disagree. In the previous survey last March, 18 percent of respondents were positive while 80 percent were negative when asked that question.

Tokyo's winning bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics also did little to provide optimism for the rebuilding of Fukushima Prefecture.

Just 12 percent of respondents believe the sports event will bolster the prefecture's recovery. In fact, 77 percent expect preparations for the Games will put Fukushima reconstruction work on the back burner, according to the survey.

Fukushima Prefecture residents were more negative toward the Olympics in terms of recovery work than people in other regions.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents in the nationwide survey in October said the Olympics will encourage recovery work in the disaster-hit Tohoku region, compared with 46 percent who said the world's largest sports festival will divert rebuilding efforts away from northeastern Japan.

The latest survey did show that anxieties about radiation in Fukushima Prefecture have eased somewhat.

The results showed that 67 percent of residents feel varying levels of stress about living in Fukushima Prefecture. The figure was 75 percent in March last year and 80 percent two years ago.

Those greatly or fairly anxious about radioactive substances harming themselves and their families accounted for 68 percent of the respondents, down from 76 percent in the previous year and 91 percent in a survey taken half a year after the nuclear disaster unfolded.

Optimism also appears to be rising in the prefecture about food safety.

Only 8 percent said they refuse to eat food products made in Fukushima Prefecture, while 38 percent said they are reluctant to consume the products.

Thirty percent feel slightly uncomfortable about eating Fukushima Prefecture food, while 24 percent have no problems whatsoever with the products, the survey showed.

According to the survey, 41 percent of men and 50 percent of women in the prefecture are reluctant to eat Fukushima food.

In the February nationwide survey, 40 percent of all respondents said they feel hesitant about consuming food produced in Fukushima Prefecture, compared with 59 percent who said they do not.

Onawaga: Demolition of proposed memorial

March 4, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Miyagi town starts demolition of proposed 3/11 memorial

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201403040025

ONAGAWA, Miyagi Prefecture--Demolition work began here March 3 on a toppled building that many townspeople wanted to preserve as a memorial to the devastation caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

The four-story Onagawa Supplement building, which was built around 1967, was knocked over when tsunami waves an estimated more than 10 meters high destroyed much of the fishing town center on March 11 three years ago.

Despite a movement to keep the toppled concrete building as is, Onagawa town officials decided to demolish the structure to prevent it from hampering reconstructing efforts.

Susumu Chiba, 52, who operated a health food store in the Onagawa Supplement building, and his family of five lived in the structure at the time of the disaster. They survived by fleeing to higher ground and later moved to his wife's hometown in Aomori Prefecture.

Chiba had few words to say about the demolition.

"I am away from there now," he said.

Although a rare occurrence, two other buildings remained intact after being toppled by the tsunami in Onagawa.

One, the four-story Enoshima Kyosai Kaikan building, is scheduled for demolition by autumn. The other, the two-story Onagawa "koban" (police box), will be preserved as a memorial.

The disaster killed 569 people in Onagawa and left three still missing, according to the town's website.

Sailing with his (lost)loved ones

March 4, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Fisherman who lost family on 3/11 sails with them in spirit

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201403040036

By ATSUSHI MATSUKAWA/ Staff Writer

YAMADA, Iwate Prefecture--A fisherman who lost his family in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami three years ago hopes to rejuvenate himself with a ship he named after his loved ones.

Wearing a towel around his neck, Yasuhiro Igarashi seems almost cheerful sitting inside "Fukko-Shokudo Yamada-Eki" (Reconstruction eatery Yamada station), the only pub that stands in the bleak central part of this town.

“Yamada has the best mikoshi (portable shrines). We will revive them in a festival in September,” he says.

Night advances, and customers slowly begin to leave. Three hours have passed since Igarashi started drinking, and the conversation turns to the March 11, 2011, disaster.

“I wanted my children to have many difficult and pleasant experiences,” Igarashi, 50, says.

The pub owner, Hideki Saito, 56, responded: “Igarashi tells me that his family members died in the disaster because he did bad things in his younger days. He says it is like he killed them even though I tell him repeatedly, ‘Don’t say such a stupid thing.’ ”

Hearing what Saito says, the fisherman takes a swig of shochu (traditional Japanese distilled spirit).

Immediately following the magnitude-9 earthquake, Igarashi sailed a 15-ton Pacific cod fishing boat far offshore to prevent it from being destroyed by a tsunami. At that time, he was employed as captain of the vessel.

Two days later, he returned only to learn his seaside house had been swept away, and his parents, wife and two children were missing.

Every morning afterwards, he placed five tea cups on the former site of his house and prayed for the souls of his kin.

He later bought the 15-ton fishing boat and renamed the vessel “Yusei Maru.” The word “yu” came from the names of his daughter, Yuki, then 3, and his son, Yuta, then 2. The “sei” came from his wife’s name, Masako, then 41. The kanji character for “masa” can be also read as “sei.”

For about six months, he continued to search morgues for his wife and two children, but never found their bodies.

Now he keeps photos of his family around the Buddhist altar inside a new house he built high on a hilltop, where it can never be engulfed by a tsunami.

An article about Igarashi, written in 2011, led a movie director to make a documentary film about his efforts to restart Pacific cod fishing.

“My children were 2 and 3 years old. I really feel sorry for them. They died because I was no good,” Igarashi said in the movie.

He sniffled on the sofa in his house while watching that scene on a DVD. But it was the documentary’s final scene showing Igarashi sailing out to sea that gave him strength.

“I will revive myself,” he told himself at the time.

These days it seems he is doing just that. Not only is he looking forward to the town’s matsuri (festival) in the fall, he is also thinking about starting a new family.

“I want to have a child. I cannot forget my children (who died). But I want to work hard, not for myself, but for someone else. It is my only desire,” he says.

Rebuilding Okuma

March 4, 2014

Fukushima town to start rebuilding

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140304_17.html

A town that co-hosts the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant has signed a deal with a government-affiliated agency to rebuild part of the town's infrastructure during the next 4 years.

All 10,000 residents of the town of Okuma were evacuated due to the nuclear accident 3 years ago.

The municipality will start work on the Ogawara district as the first step in rebuilding the community. The government's decontamination efforts have decreased radiation levels in Ogawara, in the southern part of the town. Residents are allowed to visit the district but not to live there.

The municipality hopes to have electricity, water and other infrastructure in place by the end of March 2017.

Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe and Ikuo Kaminishi, president of the semi-public Urban Renaissance Agency, signed a memorandum on Monday to get the project under way.

Watanabe said reconstruction in the area will be the first step toward rebuilding Okuma. He said he hopes to start work as soon as possible with the agency's help.

The town and agency plan to hold further discussions so they can reach a more detailed agreement in fiscal 2014.

Mar. 4, 2014 - Updated 03:43 UTC

Reconstruction

March 5

Reconstruction plan for Fukushima village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140305_24.html

Evacuees from a village near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant have drafted a plan to start rebuilding with solar power and public housing.

A panel of evacuees and experts presented the plan on Tuesday to the mayor of Iitate village, Norio Kanno.

The once-peaceful farming village still stands deserted 3 years after the nuclear meltdown at the plant 30 kilometers away. The town's administration was moved to a building in Fukushima City.

The villagers want to start rebuilding in Fukaya District by March next year. They are currently allowed to visit the district but are forbidden to live there.

They want public housing for seniors living alone. They're also planning a flower farm and other projects to create jobs. A large solar power plant will provide the village with energy independence.

The villagers say they hope the government will speed up decontamination work and end evacuation orders for most parts of the village in 2 years. The work to reduce radiation levels has taken longer than expected.

Mayor Kanno says the plan is more in line with people's wishes compared to previous ones.

Mar. 5, 2014 - Updated 06:11 UTC

Human memory very short

March 4, 2014

Our beastly post-Fukushima age complete

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/03/04/commentary/our-beastly-post-fukushima-age/#.UxluBoXrV1s>

by Chikako Nakayama

Half-life is one of the basic technical terms in dealing with radioactive materials. Plutonium-239, for example, has a half-life of 24,100 years, meaning that it takes that long for its radioactivity to fall to half of its original level. To remind people that an immeasurable time is needed for plutonium-239's radiation to drop to a harmless level, Danish film director Michael Madsen used the title "Into Eternity" for his 2010 documentary film on the underground storage of nuclear waste in Finland.

Since the average life-expectancy of human beings is around 80 years at best, even 1,000 years is far too long a time for us to imagine what the world will be like then.

A former director in Japan who has produced excellent TV programs on Hiroshima, Chernobyl, etc., once made a metaphorical warning that **the half-life of human memory is rather short**. His warning hits the nail on the head as we tend to lose our knowledge of disastrous accidents even of a world scale in a short time.

And even though we experienced a catastrophe in Fukushima in our own country, three years sometimes seem to be already too long to keep the memory. Although numerous columns and essays, including mine, will appear around March 11, it is not enough to remember the day only once a year. The disaster still continues.

Masami Yoshizawa lives on his farm with more than 300 cows in the town of Namie about 14 km from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, where the triple reactor meltdowns occurred. He has been criticized for staying on and keeping domestic animals there because it is illegal to live in that area heavily contaminated with radioactive materials released from the plant. His life itself is a rebellion against the law.

Two years ago in Fukushima, I happened to listen to him shouting to participants of a first anniversary memorial ceremony of the 3/11 disaster. Roaring from outside the place, he said, "We are still alive but we have no meaning to live!"

He wrote what he meant in his blog essay titled "Fukushima and Namie embracing Chernobyl," dated March 1, 2012. "The time has stopped in Futaba and Namie since the huge confusion in evacuation. ... The towns and the visions of their inhabitants have been divided. ... Cultivating rice has no meaning. Kindergartens, elementary and other schools have no meaning since children or their parents will not come back. ... There is no meaning in hospitals, supermarkets or other shops. ... I personally do not see any meaning in decontamination of radioactive fallouts. ... What could be our hope here?"

Certainly it must have been extremely difficult to find any hope for the future, but Yoshizawa has named his farm Ranch of Hope. He says that although he knows that there is no economic value in his domestic

animals exposed to radiation, it does not necessarily mean that they are “walking debris” — a terrible label given by officials of the agriculture ministry who want these animals “disposed of,” i.e., killed.

Yoshizawa is entirely right. Life is not a commodity, and these animals do not need to be killed just because their flesh or milk cannot be eaten or drunk and it is costly to keep feeding them. What kind of law is it that forces them to be killed?

Yoshizawa’s protest reminds me of Seiichi Motohashi, a film director who focused on disappearing villages near Chernobyl after the nuclear accident. His first motivation to film them was aroused by an old farmer who refused to leave his place. “Where else should I go? It is human beings that tainted this land,” the farmer said to Motohashi. This farmer also lived with an increasing number of cows that could not be sold and his life was a silent protest.

I do not mean to insist at all that it was or is unjust to escape after a serious accident. The right to flee from a danger has to be guaranteed as one of the basic rights of living creatures. And farmers who slaughtered their precious animals in accordance with an order from the government should be compensated. But it is also essential to realize that arbitrary political decisions to designate some areas as “exclusion zones” or cancel the designation destroy the lives of inhabitants.

Yoshizawa’s Ranch of Hope is not an instrument of politics. It is intended to offer epidemiological case studies of animals exposed to radiation. A veterinarian for the ranch, Setsuro Ito, said that he would welcome it if some professional laboratories or researchers were interested in doing collaborative work with him and Yoshizawa.

Motohashi has recently produced a film on the slaughtering of cows for food, “A Story of a Butcher Shop,” directed by Aya Hanabusa. The family running this butcher shop in Osaka has traditionally raised, slaughtered and butchered cows and sold their meat for more than 100 years.

The slaughterhouse was closed in 2012 and the film, which describes the closing days of the shop, shows the whole process that eventually leads to us buying and eating meat. We can understandably assume why Motohashi committed himself to this film. For most people, the slaughter of animals for the sake of obtaining nourishment is unavoidable.

Further, this perspective of Motohashi leads us to a better understanding of the meaning of the toil of Yoshizawa. His life of offering his cows to our nourishing process was ruined by the Fukushima catastrophe and his experience, although seemingly indirectly, has significance for our dietary life. The system to offer not only meat but also vegetables, rice, fish and many other kinds of food is still suffering from the disaster in this country. We have to remember Fukushima from this perspective.

Chikako Nakayama is a professor of economic thought at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

Shame linked to TEPCO

March 08, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Daughter of TEPCO worker struggles with family discord

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201403080039

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--A teenage girl whose family has fallen apart since the Fukushima nuclear crisis unfolded is finally coming to terms with her father's job

Haruka Yashiro's father, 51, works for Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Her family lived in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, within 20 kilometers of the plant, where a triple meltdown was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

"You said it would be OK, but it wasn't OK in the end!" her mother, now 49, bawled at her husband in the summer of 2011, the 18-year-old Haruka recalls. They were staying in an apartment--the family's fourth evacuation shelter--in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture.

Her father just remained silent, she says.

Haruka, then a first-year high school student, recalls shutting herself up in the lavatory. Weeping quietly so she would not be overheard, she tried to comprehend how this had happened to her family.

On the second day of the nuclear crisis, the family had to evacuate and sleep in their car.

Haruka's father was called back to the nuclear plant to help bring the situation under control. He was only able to return to his family's shelter eight days a month. Haruka watched as her father's slender build became even skinnier, and his cheeks grew hollow.

Her mother deleted about 30 names from her cellphone directory after acquaintances began accusing her of "pretending to be a victim" and calling on her to "take responsibility."

Even Haruka's grandmother, who evacuated to Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, did not want to be associated with the family. "Do you realize how ashamed I feel because your husband works for TEPCO?" she told her daughter, who broke into tears.

This was in spite of the fact that Haruka's mother, who worked for a TEPCO group company in her youth, followed the advice of Haruka's grandmother to marry an employee of TEPCO, which was considered a secure employer.

Soon after, Haruka's parents stopped talking to each other. Instead, she would receive e-mails from her father and relay the messages to her mother.

Whenever she saw footage of anti-nuclear protests on TV news programs, Haruka says she felt resentful, as if the protesters were accusing her father.

"They didn't even know the locations of nuclear plants that provided electricity to Tokyo," she says of her thoughts at the time. "And none of them wants to learn how hard my father is working. They're sort of irresponsible, aren't they?"

But deep inside, she also worried that people would shun her if she talked about her father to anyone. As a result, she rarely mentioned him in conversation while in high school.

A turning point came in the summer of 2012, when Haruka was among 300 high school students from disaster-stricken areas in northeastern Japan invited to visit the United States on a short-term program organized by a nonprofit entity and a private company. As she sat through discussions with her fellow participants and U.S. students, Haruka realized she was gaining more courage to speak openly.

Back in Japan, Haruka joined a meeting in Tokyo where high school students from disaster areas discussed challenges facing northeastern Japan. She made up her mind to tell her own story after she listened to a high school student from Miyagi Prefecture who recounted how she lost her mother to the tsunami.

Haruka said she was so nervous that she trembled while speaking, but everybody listened to her story, some in tears.

The disaster gave her the opportunity to become stronger, she said.

After relocating to Iwaki in the spring of 2012, Haruka joined a group that organizes bus tours to the city in hopes of increasing tourism, which plummeted after the 3/11 disaster. The group was initiated by one of Haruka's fellow high school participants in the U.S. visit program.

The bus tour program began in May 2013 with the support of a travel agency and is currently in its third phase.

On a recent tour, Haruka told tourists from the Tokyo metropolitan area that she is the daughter of a TEPCO employee who is working to end the nuclear crisis.

"Please never forget that we used to live in Naraha," she told them.

One tourist responded with a hug. Another said her father and his colleagues were "heroes."

Haruka says at that moment she felt that she finally spoke out for her father, who has turned taciturn and has seldom smiled since the onset of the nuclear disaster.

At home, however, relationships are still fractured. Her mother has not forgiven Haruka's grandmother for what she said.

Her father, who is working to extract nuclear fuel from the No. 4 reactor at the crippled plant, comes home only on weekends. Even when he is back, he and Haruka's mother don't look each other in the eye.

Haruka graduated from high school on March 1. From April, she will be studying architecture at a university in Fukushima Prefecture.

"I wish our family could sit together in the living room and chat happily as we used to do," she said. "But I have no idea what I could do to make that happen."

However, with her newly found courage, she does plan to confront her grandmother and ask why she said what she did to her mother. She says she is confident that her action could help re-establish relationships within the family.

Keep the schools open?

March 7, 2014

Education chief backs Fukushima schools but municipalities face many hurdles

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140307p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister Hakubun Shimomura says the government will give serious thought to plans by municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture's Futaba County to keep their elementary and junior high schools open despite a decline in enrollment in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"It's important to give consideration," Shimomura said in a recent interview with the Mainichi Shimbun. He added that adults should think more seriously about the fact that children in regions hard hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster have not been able to return to their hometowns for three years.

He made a strong pledge to support a scheme by a council of eight towns and villages in the county and the Fukushima prefectural and central governments to establish a combined junior high and high school in the form of startup appropriations and curriculum compilation.

While acknowledging that a consolidation of elementary and junior high schools across Japan will continue due to the nation's declining birthrate, Shimomura said that schools in Futaba County are another story and that the government will take into account municipalities' desires to keep their schools.

Only about 10 percent of elementary and junior high school students in the county who evacuated to other parts of Japan following the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant have returned home. If schools in the county shut down, households with children won't be able to return home, jeopardizing the very survival of local governments per se.

Meanwhile, moves are under way to set up a combined junior high and high school, but evacuees are gradually taking root in relocated locations and a sense of hometown loss among children is becoming a reality.

Three mini schools under the jurisdiction of Futaba County will start class this spring, reflecting local determination to keep the local community alive.

The town of Futaba relocated its town hall and many of its residents to the city of Kazo in Saitama Prefecture, about 200 kilometers away, after the nuclear crisis struck. It will resume schooling at elementary and junior high school level in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki in April with four students each. There were a total of 551 elementary and junior high school students in Futaba before the nuclear disaster.

A 41-year-old nuclear power plant worker who is living in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Hirono away from his family has decided to move his family from Niigata Prefecture to Iwaki. His 10-year-old son will attend the makeshift Futaba Kita Elementary School. The son had stopped going to school in Niigata.

The man said, "I had to take action. I want him to work hard at a school with many students but I also want him to make up for lost time with a small number of fellow students." There are many students who have returned home after failing to familiarize themselves with evacuated locations or being bullied. Local teachers who have first-hand knowledge of them are vital to the children.

Another example of resumed schooling concerns the town of Namie, also near the crippled nuclear power plant. The town opened an elementary school and junior high school in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu in August 2011 after consolidating six elementary schools and three junior high schools. There were 28 elementary school students and 33 junior high school students then, accounting for only 3 percent of the pre-disaster enrollment. The combined number of elementary and junior high school students totals 58 during the current school year. The town-run Tsushima Elementary School reopened at the temporary school complex this spring to accept three brothers -- a second-grader, a fifth-grader and a sixth-grader.

Kiichiro Hatakeyama, superintendent of the Namie Municipal Board of Education, said the town wanted to reopen all schools, adding it will be difficult for students to return to their former schools if the situation remains the same.

But the reality is very harsh. The town of Tomioka reopened four elementary and junior high schools and a kindergarten by renovating factory facilities in the town of Miharu six months after the nuclear meltdowns but came under fire from town residents for taking such action too late.

The combined enrollment at the four elementary and junior high schools totals 64. But there will be no first-graders at the two elementary schools in the coming school year.

The village of Katsurao resumed schooling at elementary and junior high level on the premises of a former school in Miharu in April last year. But there will be no new entrant at the elementary school in the coming school year.

The town of Naraha resumed schooling in Iwaki in April 2012 and about 20 percent of town school students returned.

But the number of new elementary and junior high school students in the coming school year totals only 33, compared with 37 prospective graduates.

The town of Okuma succeeded in resuming schooling in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Aizuwakamatsu only one month after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis thanks to the full cooperation of the city's education board. But there have been a growing number of families with children who have relocated to Iwaki, closer to their hometown than Aizuwakamatsu, since last year. They are doing so because they can no longer stand life in unfamiliar environs. The combined number of students at two elementary schools and one junior high school comes to 284 now but will dwindle to 197 in the coming school year.

Toshihide Takeuchi, superintendent of the Okuma Municipal Board of Education, said the town made the right decision to reopen schools to lead townspeople as an initial response to the nuclear disaster. But as the days have gone by, schoolchildren have relocated to places where their parents work. He expressed regret that the town simultaneously should have reopened its schools and created jobs for parents.

Relocation in progress

March 5, 2014

Editorial: Renewing support for community-led disaster recovery

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140305p2a00m0na002000c.html>

In the Miyagi Prefecture city of Higashimatsushima, where 1,100 residents perished in the tsunami triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, steps are being taken toward the collective relocation of its residents. To help that process along, a massive 1.2-kilometer conveyor belt began

operating this year, transporting enormous volumes of soil and sand from the hills of the city's Nobiru district to the coast.

The Higashimatsushima municipal government had estimated that it would take nearly four years to transport the soil using trucks. Arguing that taking that much time would entirely derail the relocation plan, Mayor Hideo Abe sought assistance from the national government and succeeded in securing 7 billion yen to install the contraption.

The city's population, which prior to the 2011 disaster was approximately 43,000, is now 40,000. The sight of soil being carried out to create a hill amid freezing winds and noise created by heavy machinery is symbolic of reconstruction's race against time.

Almost three years have passed since the triple disasters and some 267,000 people are still evacuated, of which some 100,000 live in prefab temporary housing. Those who have been able to rebuild their own homes are just a small percentage of disaster survivors.

Collective relocation has been touted as a promising measure against tsunami damage. But by March 2016, the fifth anniversary of the disasters, land provision will have been completed in only half of planned municipalities in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures. Only 80 percent of planned rental "disaster reconstruction housing" will have been provided by that time. What is most painful for disaster survivors is being prevented from constructing a vision toward rebuilding their lives, including such concerns as homes and employment. The fact that collective relocation of the three most affected prefectures of Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi was reduced by about 20 percent -- or some 5,800 units -- in the past year represents a harsh reality in which many have had to give up rebuilding homes in their hometowns.

Two political hurdles must be overcome if the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling and opposition parties are serious about accelerating reconstruction.

The first is to resolve the plight of municipal governments that have run into trouble buying the land necessary for relocation. Complicated land rights have slowed the land acquisition process in the Iwate Prefecture town of Otuschi, and many other municipalities have faced other barriers securing the necessary land.

The Reconstruction Agency has responded to the situation by sending support staff and simplifying the official procedures for acquiring land, but many are calling for the enactment of a special law regarding land expropriation for municipalities in these specific situations. It is an area in which administrative changes are slow to occur, particularly because private property rights come into play. As such, political parties should determine if prompt proposal of lawmaker-initiated legislation is necessary.

There has been a surge in public works nationwide under the Abe Cabinet, and many reconstruction projects are ending up with unsuccessful bids. Abe's "Abenomics" economic growth policy and the growing construction demands of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics could possibly hinder reconstruction efforts. There have been calls for a review of the standards for calculating construction costs and the short-term employment of foreign workers. We urgently need to lay down measures that address reconstruction-related demands.

In spite of the challenges we face, steps toward recovery are being made. In Higashimatsushima, for example, a self-governing organization that existed from before the disaster participated in the selection of several candidate sites for collective relocation, and community-building plans are being created based on discussions by residents' groups.

For example, the Higashiyamoto Station North Housing Complex residents' group has begun allocating land plots, and visions for the planned community's landscape and local rules -- such as allowing pets to live in the housing complex and in neighboring "disaster reconstruction residences" -- are being deliberated by the residents who are expected to move there.

"We want to make it maybe not 100 percent, but 70- or 80-percent satisfactory to everyone," says Takeichi Ono, 66, who chairs the residents' group. "We want to make it the best housing complex in Japan."

For community-driven initiatives to work, the national government must entrust planning to municipal governments and offer support behind the scenes, and municipal governments must entrust planning to residents while providing support as well. But the various parts of that mechanism don't always work well together.

The government of the Miyagi Prefecture town of Yamamoto has a vision to build a compact city in which disaster-hit communities will be re-established in the town's inland areas where public transportation systems and urban functions are concentrated. However, the plan has garnered objections that it ignores the lifestyles of disaster survivors who want to relocate closer to their former homes.

Furthermore, because the Reconstruction Agency insists on keeping recovery subsidies from the national government equal among municipalities, many disaster-hit municipalities have complained of the subsidies' lacking user-friendliness. Without a trusting relationship that allows for subsidies to be approved on things that local government chiefs deem necessary in response to constantly changing needs, we will not be able to realize community-driven plans.

The national government's role will eventually change. It has designated the period from the disaster's onset to the 5-year anniversary as a "focused recovery period," increasing the recovery budget from 19 trillion yen to 25 trillion yen. The focus of recovery assistance will shift from the infrastructural to more "soft" sectors.

Assistance in the form of input from private companies and nonprofit organizations regarding the effective use of land that was submerged under seawater in the tsunami, the revival of agricultural and marine products, and job security will become increasingly important. The Reconstruction Agency is trying to provide forums for major corporations and local companies to connect, but the efforts are still insufficient. We are being tested to overcome the sectionalism of central government bureaucracy and arrive at a more integrated type of cooperation.

As the population declines and the birth rate drops, the question is: how can local communities sustain themselves, and how can they protect their jobs and their lifestyles? The question asked of the disaster-hit areas is a question that is asked of many communities across Japan.

The path that is taken by the recovery process is a mirror of our future society. As the disaster-hit areas enter a new phase, not only the government, but we as members of the public, must renew our dedication to assisting in their recovery.

March 05, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Return to Fukushima: A movie by Nao Kubota

March 08, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: In his first movie, TV documentarian depicts return to deserted Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201403080016

By YUKA ORII/ Staff Writer

When TV documentary producer Nao Kubota saw media reports about the no-entry zones around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, he thought there must be people who wanted to return to their former hometowns now that they were deserted.

That thought led him to make his first movie "Ieji" (homeward), which opened March 1.

"If I produce a TV documentary under the same theme, people who talked honestly in the documentary could be criticized by other people. (If that actually happens) I cannot take responsibility (for the criticism). But I wanted to convey the reality of Fukushima as a universal work that people will watch, even after many years," Kubota said.

He chose to set the time element of his movie as occurring in the present, rather than soon after the nuclear accident, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The film is set in a coastal town in Fukushima Prefecture, whose residents were forced to evacuate and are now facing difficulties in returning home.

One of the former residents is a man played by actor Seiyo Uchino who stands to inherit the family farm, but lost the farmland due to the nuclear accident.

His younger half-brother, played by actor Kenichi Matsuyama, had left their hometown many years ago. The two brothers face a "hometown they cannot return to." In such a situation, the two look to the future as a true family again.

The younger half-brother returns and decides to live in the now-deserted town and actually starts to plant rice there, even in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster.

As for the younger half-brother and his biological mother, Kubota said, "People are strong but weak. That's why they live together as a family."

In the film, Kubota tried to describe the sadness of people who were forced to leave their hometowns and the difficulties of making a living.

In seeing the abundant nature in Fukushima, however, he felt puzzlement as to why people cannot live there. Wanting to convey this feeling, he shot the movie in no-residence zones in Kawauchi and some other municipalities where the residents had evacuated, and the greenery in the fields and mountains have become greener.

When he shot the film's climax of rice planting, the actors received instructions from a farming family in Kawauchi. Other local people also helped with the filming.

"I strongly felt that farmers are not just cultivating rice but are lavishing affection on their rice fields," Kubota said.

"I repeatedly asked myself whether it is really allowable to shoot a movie in Fukushima. But now I think from my heart that it was good to have done so."

Stress weighs heavily in Tohoku

March 07, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Stress-related deaths reach 2,973 in Tohoku

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201403070057

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Stress-related deaths have exceeded the death toll of those directly killed by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in Fukushima Prefecture, as Asahi Shimbun survey showed.

As of the end of January, in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, 2,973 people had died from physical and psychological fatigue since the disaster struck on March 11, 2011, the survey showed

Fukushima Prefecture, which hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, accounted for 1,660 of those deaths, compared with 1,607 deaths directly caused by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami.

The stress-related death toll was 879 for Miyagi Prefecture and 434 for Iwate Prefecture, according to the survey.

In Fukushima Prefecture, more than 130,000 people have been evacuated because of the nuclear accident, and the emotional strain from living away from home is taking a toll.

“Older people tend to get ill due to changes in their environments,” a prefectural government official said. “Stress from anxiety about an unforeseeable return home also affects their health and can lead to death.”

According to Fukushima Prefecture, more than 80 percent of stress-related deaths in the prefecture occurred among residents of 11 municipalities with designated evacuation zones following the 2011 disaster.

Among the applications for recognition as disaster-related victims, 83.0 percent were accepted as such in Fukushima Prefecture, 59.4 percent in Iwate Prefecture and 75.5 percent in Miyagi Prefecture, the survey showed.

The number of stress-related deaths in the three prefectures was 2,634 in March 2013, according to the Reconstruction Agency, meaning the number has increased by 339 over the following 10 months.

There are no legal standards to recognize deaths from physical and mental fatigue following a tsunami or nuclear power accident. The designation is determined by municipalities, and this has led to disputes concerning public consolation payment.

Once recognized as a disaster victim, those considered the breadwinners of their families are granted 5 million yen while others receive 2.5 million yen in consolation payments.

Nearly 3,000 post-disaster deaths have been recognized as disaster-related, but the case of Sayo Takano was not one of them.

An evacuee from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, she had been transferred to and from hospitals and care facilities. She died in a hospital in January 2012 at the age of 90.

Her son, Mitsuji Takano, a resident of Minami-Soma and Fukushima prefectural assembly member, applied to the city for recognition of her death as disaster-related in December 2012.

The city rejected the application in February 2013.

“(Sayo) was in a position of receiving care at any time,” the city said. “And we cannot recognize a direct relation between the disaster and the cause of her death.”

Takano, 61, filed a lawsuit with the Fukushima District Court.

“My mother died after being deprived of her strength to live because of the unforeseeable evacuation,” Takano said.

(This article is written by Shinichi Fujiwara and Shiori Tabuchi.)

Unhappy about slow reconstruction

March 5, 2014

Most 3.11 survivors unhappy with slow rebuilding

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140306_06.html

An NHK survey has found that most survivors of Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami are unhappy about the slow pace of reconstruction of their communities.

NHK polled 2,878 evacuees from the worst-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima over a one-month period from January. 1,201 people, or 42 percent, responded.

Asked about the reconstruction projects underway in their home towns, 44 percent said they don't have the impression that the projects are progressing. Thirty-six percent said reconstruction is slower than expected.

This means as many as 80 percent are still dissatisfied with the speed of reconstruction, though the figure is down 8 percentage points from last year's poll.

A total of 92 percent of the most dissatisfied residents said the most delayed projects are for new housing and housing lots for evacuees.

Eighty-seven percent cited delays in making preparations against future nuclear accidents and exposure to radiation.

Mar. 5, 2014 - Updated 23:08 UTC

Still haunted by radiation fear

March 7, 2014

Survey: 74% of voluntary evacuees not returning

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140307_34.html

An NHK survey has found that many voluntary evacuees from Fukushima are **still haunted by radiation fears** and plan to live outside the prefecture for good.

NHK conducted the survey ahead of the 3rd anniversary of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Following the March 2011 accident, at least 25,000 people who lived outside government-designated evacuation zones left the prefecture voluntarily. NHK received responses from 307 such people.

Results show that 74 percent are planning to stay where they are now or find a new place to settle down. Some of these people had returned to Fukushima at one point but decided to flee again. Many of them cited fears about radiation and possible exposure.

65 percent of the respondents said their household budgets are squeezed, due mostly to a decline in income and savings. Transportation costs were also cited as a heavy burden.

Voluntary evacuees are subject to partial waivers of expressway tolls and limited housing support under a government program.

The survey respondents included 129 households in which the husbands are staying in Fukushima but their wives live separately.

97 percent of them said the husbands have work in the prefecture. 25 percent of the couples cited conflicting views on evacuation and radiation as the reasons for living apart.

37 percent of the couples that live apart said family ties have deteriorated.

60 percent said they were consulting their partners less about personal concerns and about 70 percent said they talk less.

23 percent of the overall respondents had divorced or were planning to divorce.

Kenichiro Kawasaki co-leads an aid group called the Save Fukushima Children Lawyers' Network that is supporting the voluntary evacuees.

Kawasaki says the evacuees need thorough assistance that serves their needs. He notes they have the right to evacuate under law, so they should be granted necessary support to ease the financial strain of being displaced for a long time.

Mar. 7, 2014 - Updated 09:47 UTC

Progress in rebuilding too little

March 9, 2014

Survey shows 60% see little progress in rebuilding

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140309_12.html

More than 60 percent of the people responding to a survey see little progress in efforts to reconstruct areas hit by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute conducted the nationwide survey from November to December of last year. It covered 3,600 people aged 16 or older. Sixty-eight percent responded.

55 percent of the respondents said reconstruction efforts are showing little progress, and 9 percent said they see no progress at all.

The survey also asked how respondents feel about efforts to decontaminate areas affected by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

13 percent said they recognize progress, while 85 percent saw little progress.

The survey also asked about the largest task for the Japanese government in the reconstruction process. 45 percent of the respondents cited handling the effects of the nuclear accident.

Associate Professor Reo Kimura of the University of Hyogo says many people affected by the disaster still cannot imagine what the areas and towns will look like after rebuilding. He says that, therefore, people are unable to sense that recovery is making progress.

Meanwhile, another survey shows that the number of corporate bankruptcies believed to result from the disaster was nearly 1,500.

Credit research firm Teikoku Databank says there were 1,485 such bankruptcies since the disaster through last month.

It says the failed companies had a total of more than 21,000 employees.

Mar. 9, 2014 - Updated 03:45 UTC

Abe in Fukushima: Recovery is underway

March 08, 2014

Abe visits Fukushima ahead of March 11 anniversary

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140308_28.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Fukushima Prefecture on Saturday, 3 days before the 3rd anniversary of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters.

In Tamura City, he met with residents of Miyakoji District. They'll be allowed to return to their homes on April 1st when an evacuation order for the district is expected to be lifted. It will be the first evacuation order lifted since the nuclear accident.

Abe asked residents to express their thoughts. One of them said he wants the government to consider building playgrounds for children as schools will reopen. He said he thinks the return of many children will help lead to the city's recovery.

Abe also visited a center for tourism and local products in Iwaki City. He tasted freshly-caught fish and squid that were captured as part of a test program being carried out to check radiation levels in marine products. Abe pledged to do his best to allay concerns about radioactive contamination of food products from the prefecture.

He inspected a site in Ogawara District, Okuma Town. As part of efforts to rebuild the region, there is a plan to build facilities to study decontamination and the decommissioning of reactors.

Abe told reporters he felt the recovery in Fukushima is in underway. He said he will do his best to rebuild the prefecture as he thinks there will be no revival for Japan without the reconstruction of Fukushima.
Mar. 8, 2014 - Updated 13:21 UTC

267,000 still

March 10, 2014

267,000 still evacuees three years on Disaster-hit communities struggle to rebuild but progress slow-going

Kyodo, Staff Report

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/10/national/267000-still-evacuees-three-years-on/#.Ux32sYVrx_Q

About 267,000 people are still living in temporary housing and other makeshift facilities nationwide as Japan marks the third anniversary Tuesday of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku that triggered an unprecedented nuclear crisis.

Police and other authorities continue to search coastal areas for people still listed as missing after the 9.0-magnitude Great East Japan Earthquake — one of the most powerful temblors on record — and subsequent tsunami left thousands dead, unaccounted for, or homeless.

After the offshore quake struck at 2:46 p.m., tsunami engulfed large parts of the northeast coast, forcing the evacuation of up to about 470,000 people.

The disaster-hit communities are still struggling with a host of woes, including lagging reconstruction and an exodus of residents.

Ahead of the third anniversary, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe renewed his pledge to help those affected rebuild their lives.

“I want to make the upcoming year (one) in which people in the disaster area can really feel reconstruction,” Abe said at a news conference. “From now on, I’ll emphasize not only the hard side of reconstruction, but also reconstruction of their hearts.”

According to the National Police Agency, 15,884 people were confirmed killed, mostly in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, and 2,636 were still missing as of Feb. 28.

In the meantime, deaths caused by suicide or the physical and mental stress of staying in shelters continue to rise and totaled 3,048 as of Monday.

Based on Reconstruction Agency statistics as of Feb. 13, more than 97,000 people remain in makeshift residences in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima, home of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, where hydrogen explosions and three reactor core meltdowns tainted large parts of the prefecture with radiation.

Japan has been thrust into a debate about the use of atomic power because of the Fukushima crisis, characterized as the world’s worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

All 48 of the nation’s commercial reactors are now offline, but the government wants to restart those that clear newly established safety regulations despite strong public opposition.

According to a recent survey by NHK, nearly 80 percent of the public thinks the country should either reduce its contingent of nuclear reactors or abandon them all. The survey, conducted in November and December last year, covered 3,600 people nationwide aged 16 or older, and drew 2,459 replies.

As survivors gather to pray for the souls of their relatives and friends at memorial services, some communities have chosen to commemorate the event in advance to avoid the media attention. Municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, which continues to grapple with the fallout from the nuclear crisis, held memorial services Sunday.

The tsunami-devastated city of Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture also held its memorial service Sunday.

“Tuesday is a weekday and we do not have a big facility that can host a ceremony,” a city official said. “And it is easier for many people who lost their families to go on a Sunday.”

Traumatized youngsters

March 10, 2014

Tohoku kids stressed, haunted by trauma

Anxieties bottled up amid life in shelters with parents living under duress

by Mizuho Aoki

Staff Writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/10/national/tohoku-kids-stressed-haunted-by-trauma/#.Ux33soVrx_Q

MINAMISOMA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Almost every day around a dozen students seek out nurse Akemi Idogawa at their temporary junior high school in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, hoping she will help ease their trauma.

Many at the prefabricated school, in the city’s Odaka district, also live in temporary housing, after they and their families were forced three years ago to flee their homes because of the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Some of the kids tell Idogawa about their aches and pains. But when she offers them a bed to nap on, they usually prefer to sit and just talk.

They speak about the frustration in their daily lives as evacuees living in temporary housing, about bullies at schools they used to attend. They voice the anxieties they have been carrying since the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami wiped out some of their former communities, and their uncertainties about the radiation-tainted future.

Idogawa said talking brings some relief to the suffering students.

“Many of the students don’t want to return to their classrooms until I listen to their stories,” Idogawa, 60, said.

Three years after the earthquake and tsunami took the lives of nearly 16,000 people, many child survivors are gradually adapting to their new environment and moving forward with their lives. But there are still many who suffer from the loss of loved ones, homes and the lives they led before disaster struck.

Idogawa said they need emotional support to cope, and to pour out their feelings.

The original Odaka junior high is within 20 km of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant in Minamisoma, an area still designated as an evacuation zone. The city hopes to reopen the school in 2016 but is uncertain how many students will return. It is also uncertain how much radioactive contamination remains.

The Odaka school originally had some 380 students. It now has a roster of 94, most of them living in crowded temporary housing or other government-prepared accommodations. Four students were killed by the tsunami.

The kids don’t have their own rooms at home or a garden to play in.

Since autumn 2011, they and their teachers have had to hold class in a gray, two-story prefabricated school that is constantly shaking from nearby construction work. Sand enters through gaps in the floors and sounds reverberate from adjoining classrooms separated by narrow walls.

The nurse’s office is the only place aside from their classrooms and a dark corridor where the students can take a break, Idogawa said.

“Three years have passed. But it will take much more time for these children to gain a sense of belonging or to be able to make efforts toward self-realization,” she said, noting the children bottle up their emotions as they see their parents also suffering anxiety over an uncertain future.

After the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the number of elementary and junior high school children who were assessed as in need of mental care peaked three years after the temblor and resulting fires took the lives of more than 6,400 people, according to the Hyogo Prefectural Board of Education.

A health ministry survey taken between September 2012 and June 2013 said 33.8 percent of the children in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures who were aged 3 to 5 at the time of the disasters, which hit their prefectures the hardest, exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including sleeping problems and flashbacks. That was nearly 10 times higher than the 3.7 percent logged for children in Mie Prefecture in Kansai, who were surveyed for comparison.

Another recent government survey found that in fiscal 2012, truants at elementary and junior high schools rose by 7.1 percent to 2,511 in Miyagi Prefecture and by 5 percent to 1,566 in Fukushima. The national average has been declining for the past five years.

Although it's unclear how the disaster correlates with the spike in truancy, experts believe the increase partially comes from the stress caused by losing loved ones and the drastic changes in living environment.

And many parents are unable to provide the emotional support they once did because they, too, are overwhelmed with stress from the need to earn a living, find jobs, or weigh an uncertain future.

As more people leave temporary housing to make a fresh start in life, it causes those who stay behind to become increasingly lonely and suffer growing anxiety, psychiatric experts said.

Children tend to be influenced by their parents' circumstances and mental states, they said.

As of Feb. 10, about 267,000 evacuees were still living in temporary housing and other accommodations, according to the Reconstruction Agency.

In Fukushima, 11 municipalities are still partially or fully designated as evacuation zones, some so contaminated from radioactive fallout that the government doesn't know when residents can return.

Toshihiro Seino, 48, a physical education teacher at Naruse Mirai junior high school in Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, said a year after the disasters, he began to notice students displaying problematic behavior, including bullying and violence. The kids were from a school that was lost to the tsunami.

This behavior increased when the kids had to use a temporary school for a few months.

“Nothing good happens when you confine students in small spaces,” Seino said.

In March 2011, out of 156 students, three were killed by the tsunami, eight lost their mothers or fathers, and 30 to 40 students lost grandparents, Seino said.

To help the students cope, Seino has asked them to write down what they are feeling in daily life.

A girl who lost her mother to the tsunami wrote about her unease 1½ years after the disaster.

“I’m on the verge of losing the memory of my mother. The words we exchanged on the morning of the disaster, her voice, her face and the way she moved. It is more and more difficult to recall her, and it scares me. I hate myself for forgetting her,” she wrote. After writing down her thoughts, the girl told Seino that her spirit lightened.

“Pain is something individuals have to deal with at their own pace. Some students can express their sorrow soon after suffering a loss. There are also those who try to contain their sorrow. I hope they have somewhere to let out their true feelings.” Seino said.

City and prefecture sued over schoolchildren's deaths

March 10, 2014

Kin sue over tsunami deaths of 23 kids at Miyagi school

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/10/national/kin-sue-over-tsunami-deaths-of-23-kids-at-miyagi-school/#.Ux342YVrx_Q

Kyodo

SENDAI – The relatives of 23 elementary school students killed in the March 2011 tsunami in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, filed a lawsuit Monday blaming the city and prefecture for the school's failure to evacuate them to higher ground.

In the lawsuit, filed at the Sendai District Court, the plaintiffs are demanding that the municipal and prefectural governments jointly pay ¥100 million in damages for each victim.

At city-run Okawa Elementary School, 74 of the 108 students died or remain unaccounted for, and 10 of the 13 teachers and school officials died in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The school was around 4 km inland from the coast.

According to the complaint, the school had the students wait in the school yard for 50 minutes until the tsunami arrived without taking them to the mountain behind it, although it could have anticipated the danger from the tsunami warning and other information.

In the first court ruling in a damages suit filed by relatives of tsunami victims against operators of facilities in the disaster-hit areas, the district court last September ordered a kindergarten, also in Ishinomaki, to pay ¥177 million over the deaths of four children who were riding its bus when it was caught by the monster waves, determining the kindergarten could have easily grasped that massive tsunami would arrive in the area after the quake.

Home rebuilding slow

Sendai KYODO

Only 55 percent of eligible households have applied for grants for housing reconstruction since the March 2011 disasters, signalling that rebuilding remains sluggish three years on, a survey said Monday.

The survey was based on data from the governments of the three northeastern prefectures worst hit on March 11, 2011 — Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

While affected households are eligible for up to ¥2 million to repair their homes or build new ones, those mainly in the tsunami-hit coastal areas haven't been applying as quickly for the grants recently due mainly to problems with acquiring land.

The application rate in the three prefectures was 37 percent a year after the disaster, and 49 percent at the end of March 2013. But it had only risen 6 points to 55 percent at the end of February this year.

Officials of the prefectures said the supply of land eligible for housing in coastal areas is lagging because it takes time to create building lots in upland and mountainous forest areas.

Starting to fish again

March 10, 2014

Fukushima fisherman holds boat-launching ceremony



Fisherman Toshiyuki Onoda boards his new boat at Minamisoma port in Fukushima Prefecture along the waterway surrounded by debris. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140310p2a00m0na006000c.html>

MINAMISOMA, Fukushima -- Toshiyuki Onoda, a 63-year-old fisherman from Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, celebrated a launching ceremony for his new fishing boat on March 10, three years after he lost his old fishing vessel to the tsunami caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

His new fishing boat hoisted various banners signifying a big catch as he held the launching ceremony at Minamisoma port with fellow fishermen in prayer for safety of navigation. But a mountain of debris was omnipresent along the waterway to the port.

Onoda relocated to Tokyo with his family due to the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant but decided to resume fishing, encouraged by the sight of other fishermen who had also lost their boats to the tsunami returning to fishing.

"Three years after the disasters, I can finally take the first step in going fishing," he said.

March 10, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

More suing TEPCO and Government for damages

March 10, 2014

Hundreds sue operator of Fukushima plant and govt

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140310_33.html

More people affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident are suing Tokyo Electric Power Company and the government for damages.

Groups totaling about 750 plaintiffs filed lawsuits at 8 district courts across Japan on Monday, ahead of the 3rd anniversary of the accident on Tuesday.

Two of the groups filed suits in Tokyo. One is made up of some 40 people from parts of Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture, located within the 30-kilometer evacuation zone around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The plaintiffs are seeking combined damages of 13 million dollars, saying they haven't received enough compensation for their disrupted lives.

The other group consists of 230 people from parts of Tamura that are outside the 30-kilometer zone as well as residents of adjacent Tochigi Prefecture. They are demanding redress of 46 million dollars.

The statute of limitations on seeking damages from TEPCO over the nuclear accident has been extended from 3 years to 10 years.

But defense lawyers say the statute of limitations for suing the government may become a point of contention.

TEPCO says it will look into the details of the suits and deal with the matter sincerely.

The government's Nuclear Regulation Authority declined to comment.

Mar. 10, 2014 - Updated 09:50 UTC

More evacuees join damages suit against state, Tokyo Electric

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140310p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

NIIGATA/YAMAGATA, Japan (Kyodo) -- People who have evacuated to Niigata and Yamagata prefectures following the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant joined damages suits Monday against the state and the plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., seeking 1.1 million yen in compensation each over the inconvenience they have suffered and health concerns.

In Niigata, 99 plaintiffs from 30 households joined the suit at the Niigata District Court, where 354 people from 101 households had already filed it last July, while in Yamagata 207 people in 58 households joined the suit filed by 227 plaintiffs from 62 households with the Yamagata District Court, also last July.

The total amount of claims comes to 2,277 million yen.

The plaintiffs argue they have suffered severe mental distress in their refugee lives and have health concerns, according to the complaint.

March 10, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

"Receding into the fog of history"

March 8, 2014

Tsunami zone's village culture fades into fog of history

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/03/08/commentary/tsunami-zones-village-culture-fades-into-fog-of-history/#.UxxH5oXrV1t>

by Jeff Kingston

Special To The Japan Times

The government appears eager to declare progress in recovery efforts along Japan's devastated northeastern coast, but anyone visiting the tsunami-hit region must wonder what constitutes progress in officials' eyes.

Yes, debris has been cleared and less-damaged areas have regained some semblance of normalcy, but long swaths of the coast also remain ghost towns, with empty landscapes stretching to the horizon where close-knit communities used to exist. It is saddening to see the lingering effects of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and to consider how many towns, villages and fishing ports are receding into the fog of history.

True, some of the larger towns seem to be on the rebound, but in between, the visitor is confronted by many "missing teeth" along Tohoku's saw-tooth seaboard. A number of these towns were already dying, with the tsunami providing the coup de grace. We can better appreciate what Tohoku's shoreline villages represented now that they have been washed away and former residents are marooned in soulless temporary-housing ghettos where the greatest risks are isolation and boredom. Are we ready to write off the charming hamlets that used to be such a key feature of this coastal culture? I guess so, but recalling my initial visit there in 1982, I can't help but feel nostalgia for this disappearing Japan.

John Morris, a professor at Miyagi Gakuin Women's University in Sendai and resident of nearby Takajo, explains: "A casual visitor would not even know that the area has suffered extensive tsunami damage. There are a lot of empty lots in the residential and commercial parts of the city which mark sites where the owners decided to not repair their house or businesses, but the whole area has a clean, spruce look that belies what happened here three years ago. In the small industrial area around Sendai Port, there are a lot of large vacant lots where factories have closed down and either moved away or gone out of business."

Morris notes, "We want to live our lives with what we have, and reflecting on what was lost does not help you deal with the reality of today." He adds, "I cannot see that 'Abenomics' has done anything for the region, other than drive the cost of living up enormously. The few shopkeepers that I sometimes pump on the subject seem to agree that commercial activity for the 'little people' of the region around Sendai has not improved any."

Tim Graf, a Ph.D. candidate in religious studies at Heidelberg University and research associate at Tohoku University, made a poignant and haunting video about the tragic events in 2011 titled, “Souls of Zen — Buddhism, Ancestors, and the Tsunami in Japan” (www.soulsofzen.com). Recently, Graf shared some of his reflections.

“Revisiting Tohoku’s tsunami zone nearly three years on felt like a rollercoaster back in time,” he says. “Gone is the stench of death and rotten fish. Places like Yuriage and Ishinomaki (both in Miyagi Prefecture) are still flattened out. Once you enter, you are surrounded by tsunami damage, but it has a more distant feel to it. In Yuriage, you see large boards with photos and descriptions in front of ruins and gaping open spaces, showing what once was there. In a way it felt like being in a museum.”

Conducting fieldwork is easier, Graf says, because people “are so happy to have someone to talk to, they just pour out their hearts, as fewer volunteers come by to listen these days.”

Recalling his 2011 documentary project, he admits that he “was living with an illusion. Making our film about Buddhist responses to the 3/11 disasters helped me make sense of what had happened. I structured the content and turned my research into a documentary. Like any film, ours had a beginning and an end. I did my job, and was on to new things.”

Graf observes: “Of course, I knew that I wouldn’t be ‘done’ with the disaster topic, nor did I think that the people of Tohoku felt better three years on — I knew that life was no movie — but going back to the tsunami zone three years later had an even stronger impact on me. I think it was a shock to see that nothing had changed — and now, many new problems, and the fear that this would never end. My informants looked older — tired and exhausted, trapped in time.”

He adds: “It really surprised me how 3/11 continues to be one ever-growing mess. There is simply no end in sight; no recovery, nothing. Things only seemed to get worse. For many people, there is recovery. But things develop differently for different people. And I fear this gap will only widen over time. I think this must be even more stressful for those who feel left behind.

“Living with the 2011 disasters is the new normal. The 2011 disasters are hardly ever a topic between me and my friends in everyday life. I don’t think they suppress it; it’s just normal to not think about it all the time. I think that this causes yet another problem for those who feel left behind.”

Graf explains that when a priest in Ishinomaki told him, “Their hearts are burned out,” “He did not refer to the bereaved in the first place, but to the hearts of those who live in surrounding neighborhoods and those who continue to provide support for survivors. And I think he is right: People are tired and exhausted.”

Graf observes that “it is also important to note that providing care for the bereaved over such a long period of time is a very stressful job for those who provide these services. Yet there is no real support for those who provide support. . . . Volunteers, care specialists and Buddhist priests who come in from outside areas to offer help, care, in the disaster zone cannot stay for too long because they have jobs and families elsewhere. The future of local spiritual care programs like Kokoro no Sodanshitsu (“spiritual counseling center”) is also uncertain.”

Lamentably, many of the devastated communities appear to be in their death throes. Graf commented: “Those who stay in the tsunami zone are mostly elderly. I guess that in a few decades, many of these places will just die out, literally. It struck me to see that many older people in Ishinomaki do not invest in rebuilding their homes. They cannot rebuild, even if they wanted to, because they are too old to get bank loans. What they rebuild instead, though, is their graves. This is what people invest in: their grave, as a final home and resting place.”

Jeff Kingston is the director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan

Policymakers must take evacuees' plight seriously

March 08, 2014

EDITORIAL: Plight of Fukushima evacuees deserves serious policy responses

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201403080030>

Last year, while talking about the catastrophic accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Sanae Takaichi, policy chief of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, said, “We don’t have a situation where the accident is causing deaths.”

But radiation is not the only factor that is threatening the lives of people who have been evacuated from their homes in areas around the crippled nuclear plant.

The number of deaths indirectly related to the March 2011 triple meltdown--caused by poor physical health due to living as evacuees or suicides triggered by severe stress and other factors--keeps growing.

In Fukushima Prefecture, where many people are facing the gloomy prospect of having to live as evacuees for many years, there were 1,660 indirectly related deaths as of the end of January. That's more than the 1,607 deaths directly caused by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami in the prefecture. Fukushima accounts for nearly 60 percent of all indirectly related deaths in the three hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

In Fukushima, 30 or so people still die every month because of causes that are officially recognized to be linked to the calamity. Also called "nuclear accident-related deaths," these tragic losses of life throw into sharp relief the dire consequences of a severe nuclear accident that forces many people to live as evacuees for a prolonged period.

In the summer of 2012, the Reconstruction Agency announced the challenges that result from dealing with indirectly related deaths along with measures to deal with them. But last spring the agency carried out a fresh survey to obtain more detailed information about the reality evacuees are facing in Fukushima, where such deaths are showing no signs of decreasing.

The survey covered 35 indirectly related deaths that occurred one year or more after the disaster. It found that most of the victims grew gradually weak from fatigue and stress due to relocation and prolonged evacuation, or because of a deterioration in their health care situation. They had to move as many as seven times on average because of a series of changes in evacuation zones and other reasons.

One factor makes the plight of evacuees in Fukushima much worse than the situation of their counterparts in Iwate or Miyagi prefectures. That is their deep anxiety about the possibility that they may never be able to return home in their lifetimes. That's the assessment of experts included in the agency's report on the survey.

The death rate in the three months through February 2012 at the welfare facility where the survey was conducted increased by 20 percent from the same period a year earlier.

The report said it should be assumed that the overall risk to their health had increased and pointed out that the recognized indirectly related deaths were just "the tip of the iceberg."

There are more than 130,000 evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture. The biggest challenge in preventing deaths among these evacuees is how to enable them to rebuild their lives.

With decontamination work in areas polluted by radiation turning into a drawn-out battle, there is still a long way to go before the shattered lives of evacuees can be rebuilt.

Local governments in disaster-hit areas are trying to help evacuees deal with their hardships by arranging for public health nurses and livelihood support advisers to visit temporary housing and other facilities where they live. These regional authorities need to do all they can do now to help evacuees maintain their physical and mental health.

The Abe administration is keen to restart offline nuclear reactors. But the government needs to prepare evacuation plans for emergencies before bringing reactors back on stream.

It is, of course, important to work out plans for swift evacuations to avoid exposure to radiation. But it is equally important to figure out how to prevent indirectly related deaths among evacuees.

Fukushima evacuees, who have already suffered greatly from the nuclear disaster, now have to face the risk of dying because of their current circumstances. Policymakers should confront the distressing predicament of these citizens.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 8

Abe promises expressway

March 11, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Abe promises opening of expressway through disaster area by next spring

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201403110055>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged to fully open the Joban Expressway by the 2015 Golden Week holidays in an effort to promote tourism in areas devastated by the earthquake and tsunami disaster.

"In order to significantly accelerate the recovery of Fukushima, I have decided to move up the opening schedule as much as possible," Abe said at a March 10 news conference at the prime minister's office, a day before the third anniversary of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

"We will fully open the Joban Expressway before the next Golden Week holidays so that many tourists can visit Fukushima and other areas in Tohoku that were hit by the disaster," he said.

The Joban Expressway will link Misato in Saitama Prefecture and Watari in Miyagi Prefecture. Some parts of the highway were already completed at the time of the disaster.

Opening the road between Joban-Tomioka in Fukushima Prefecture, and Namie, also in the prefecture and located close to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, was expected to take years because radiation levels are still high in the vicinity due to the nuclear crisis triggered by the disaster.

The area includes "difficult-to-return zones." Residents from these areas will not be allowed to return to their homes until at least March 2017.

Abe said sections between Namie and Watari will open by year's end ahead of schedule.

The prime minister's comments came after the environment ministry completed decontamination work at the construction sites of the Joban Expressway last year. The ministry also confirmed that radiation levels can be lowered by paving roads, and said annual radiation levels along the highway will be below 50 millisieverts at an early date.

Regions affected by the nuclear accident welcomed Abe's declaration.

"(The central government) has sincerely accepted our prefecture's request," said Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato. "We will make every effort to recover from the disaster by making full use of the effects that the opening of the highway will exert."

The land ministry said Abe's announcement will bolster reconstruction work in devastated areas.

"Making it clear when the expressway will open will help local areas decide how to rebuild their communities," a ministry official said. "We will work to start full operations of the road as early as possible."

However, some local officials and residents cast doubt about whether the opening of the expressway will bring more tourists to northeastern Japan.

A Namie town official in charge of reconstruction appreciated the central government's efforts. "The scheduled opening is earlier than I expected," he said.

But the official also said, "I cannot take the government's word for it. I cannot imagine any tourism in Namie as it is now."

An evacuee from Futaba, where 96 percent of the land is designated as difficult-to-return zones, said he welcomes the opening of the road, but also criticized the government's optimism.

"The highway will run through the worst contaminated regions," said the 45-year-old evacuee who now lives in Saitama Prefecture. "It will be difficult for ordinary tourists to have the courage to pass through those areas.

"It is too optimistic of the state to refer to tourism. One who knows the reality (of the disaster-hit regions) would never say such a thing."

Is the disaster "being forgotten"?

March 11, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Asahi poll shows 3/11 survivors believe memories of disaster fading

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201403110050>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Three years after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami that ravaged northeastern Japan, a large majority of survivors surveyed by The Asahi Shimbun believe the disaster is being forgotten and reconstruction has stalled.

The survey, conducted in February by mail and personal interviews, covered about 1,000 survivors or their guardians. A total of 726 valid responses were received. The same group was surveyed last year.

In the latest survey, a combined 76 percent of respondents said they either "feel" or "feel to some extent" that the memories of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami are fading.

The figure was the highest at 83 percent in Fukushima Prefecture, where the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant suffered a triple meltdown. Next was Iwate Prefecture at 74 percent followed by 72 percent in Miyagi Prefecture.

A combined 71 percent said the reconstruction efforts in affected communities have made either “little” or “no” headway.

Survivors were also asked what impact they thought the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 will have on the disaster-hit areas, with multiple selections being allowed.

Seventy-five percent said an Olympic-induced building boom will delay reconstruction efforts, while 63 percent said the Games will divert public attention and further overshadow the disaster.

Only 13 percent said the Olympics will help highlight the plight of the disaster-hit areas abroad, and 10 percent said it will speed measures to contain the Fukushima nuclear crisis and rebuild affected communities.

The survey found survivors remain worried about their daily lives, such as making ends meet and securing jobs, though the respondents appeared a little more optimistic than last year.

Those surveyed were asked to cite one or more sources of concern for their future.

Topping the list was their “economic outlook, such as living expenses,” which was selected by 58 percent, down from 63 percent in the 2013 survey. That was followed by “keeping or securing jobs,” chosen by 39 percent, down from 41 percent the previous year.

Survivors in Fukushima Prefecture are far more worried about the contamination from the nuclear accident and the length of time they are forced to live as evacuees than their counterparts in the two other prefectures.

Fifty-two percent of Fukushima respondents chose “radiation-derived health hazards” as a concern for their future lives, compared with 6 percent in Miyagi and 5 percent in Iwate.

Fifty-one percent in Fukushima selected “health problems stemming from evacuation,” compared with 25 percent in Miyagi and 24 percent in Iwate.

The survey also indicates that health and welfare policy issues are of ever-increasing concern for the survivors.

When asked to cite up to three issues that the central and local governments should put priority on, coming in second was “aid in medical fees,” selected by 38 percent, up from 34 percent in the 2013 survey.

Nineteen percent picked “expansion of nursing care services, as well as rebuilding and adding welfare facilities,” up from 12 percent.

March 11, 2014

March 11, 2014

Bleak reality of Tohoku region

March 11, 2014

POINT OF VIEW: Don't let disaster-stricken Tohoku region remain as Tokyo's 'colony'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201403110039>



Plastic bags filled with contaminated soil near toll booths on the Joban-Tomioka Interchange in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, in March 2013 (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

By YUZURU TSUBOI/ Staff Writer

March 11 marked the third anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami disaster that triggered Japan's worst nuclear accident.

One question sums up the frustration felt by residents of the stricken Tohoku region of northeastern Japan: "Does the Tohoku region still remain a colony?"

The question was in an essay written by Norio Akasaka, director of the prefectural Fukushima Museum and folklorist, and carried by The Asahi Shimbun on Jan. 29. Akasaka was a member of the Reconstruction Design Council, an advisory panel established by the central government.

In his essay, Akasaka posed critical questions.

He asked why Fukushima Prefecture was obsessively devoted to providing electricity, generated by two nuclear power plants, to Tokyo as if it were a vassal state paying tribute to the capital.

Akasaka also asked why the intentions of local people were ignored in the name of reconstruction that focused on large-scale public works projects.

After raising these questions, he went on to point out that the 2011 triple disaster exposed a bleak reality that the Tohoku region has faced for far too long.

His view is not so far from the truth in three respects.

One is that **localities stricken by the nuclear accident have been effectively abandoned.**

Even today, newspapers dated March 12, 2011, remain piled up at a distribution store in Namie, a town close to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Residents separated from their families and communities by radioactive fallout cannot even get close to the point where they can contemplate restructuring their lives.

Secondly, **there has been little progress in what is termed as “creative rebuilding,” a vision that was drawn up for the depopulated region which serves as an epitome of any rural area in the future.**

The rebuilding projects, which were cobbled together with little coordination among central government ministries, do not offer a new platform that will allow residents to rebuild their communities based on a plan that factors in continued population decline.

The projects do not make it any easier to take on a new model for fishing and agricultural operations, either.

On top of this, preparations for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics are accelerating the drain of manpower and materials, which are essential to the rebuilding process.

Thirdly, **searing memories of the devastation are fading with the passage of time.** The fact that about 100,000 people are still forced to live in prefabricated temporary housing does not make headlines any more.

Last month, an article in The Asahi Shimbun noted that local government chiefs felt a huge gulf between the affected region and Tokyo after seeing a poster celebrating Tokyo's hosting of the Summer Olympics. It was displayed in the Reconstruction Agency, which they were visiting to lobby for rebuilding. I find the episode a painful reminder of the perception gap.

Admittedly, smiles are returning to the faces of many people in the stricken region.

That said, the Tohoku region still seems to be regarded as a convenient "colony" of Tokyo, the nation's center of affluence.

This is a reality of Japan that has not changed even after the unprecedented adversity.

I propose that everybody contemplate this third anniversary by asking some key questions.

What kind of a community are we aiming to build? Rebuilding efforts are still in the first chapter and a review of the plans is possible. We should also ask whether investments from government coffers are being spent for a meaningful purpose and are sustainable.

A picture of the stricken region five years from now or 10 years from now must be nothing but a reflection of our own in the future.

RECOVERY STILL DISTANT GOAL

According to the National Police Agency, 15,884 people died and the whereabouts of 2,633 others remained unknown as of March 10 due to the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident.

In addition, 2,973 people died of causes related to the disaster, such as deteriorating health resulting from the evacuation and suicide, in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, the three worst-affected prefectures in the Tohoku region.

In Fukushima Prefecture, the number of deaths resulting from evacuation after the nuclear accident exceeded that of the earthquake and tsunami.

About 267,000 people nationwide are still displaced due to the 2011 disaster.

About 104,000 households live in temporary housing.

The occupancy rate of prefabricated temporary housing is about 84 percent in the three prefectures.

The figure compared with less than 60 percent reported three years after the Great Hanshin Earthquake of Jan. 17, 1995, which claimed more than 6,400 lives in the Kansai region.

According to the Reconstruction Agency, 2,347 units of public housing for victims will be completed in the three prefectures by the end of this month. But the figure is only 9 percent of a total planned.

The circumstances surrounding schools, a key part of efforts to rebuild communities, are bleak.

Many children are continuing their education in makeshift schools or “renting” rooms in other schools.

The affected localities are faced with an array of challenges. These include a population drain, scant progress in rebuilding and a need to provide mental health care services.

Yuzuru Tsuboi is chief of The Asahi Shimbun's Sendai Bureau and head of its team covering the recovery of the Tohoku region.

Ready to go back?

March 10, 2014

10.03.2014_No77 / News in Brief

Three Years On, First Evacuees Are Ready To Return To Fukushima Homes

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2014/03/10/three-years-on-first-evacuees-are-ready-to-return-to-fukushima-homes>

Unplanned Events & Incidents

10 Mar (NucNet): Residents of the town of Tamura who were evacuated following the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear accident are to be allowed to move back into their homes, Japanese authorities have said.

Three years after the 11 March 2011 disaster, the Japanese government has told residents that it will lift the evacuation order on 358 people who live in eastern districts of the town on 1 April 2014.

They are the first of more than 146,000 evacuees who left the area following the accident to be given formal permission to return permanently.

In a meeting with around 100 residents, trade and industry minister Kazuyoshi Akaba said: "The government does not have the right to delay the reconstruction of your lives."

Accompanied by the town mayor and officials of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, Mr Akaba told local people that decontamination work has reduced radiation levels to safe levels – below 20 millisieverts a year – and that work to restore infrastructure has been completed.

Local people have been able to return briefly to their properties since April 2012, to carry out repair work on their homes, but they were closely monitored and not permitted to stay overnight.

Japan's nuclear regulator, the Nuclear Regulation Authority, noted that evacuees have suffered from health problems including mental stress, with concerns ranging from separation from family members and health concerns about radiation exposure.

The NRA said some evacuees are planning to return as soon as possible, while others are eager to re-build their lives in areas where they are living now.

The NRA has called on the government to offer returnees measures to support their "life-planning and radiation protection". The NRA said the government should prepare and carry out "thorough measures" to address anxieties about radiation exposure as much as possible by ensuring continued monitoring and health care.

"The authorities have to take the responsibility to check whether social systems and facilities for daily life and radiation protection are sufficient for people who made the decision to return their homes," the NRA said.

A system must be established for "thorough health care and consultations" for people who return, the NRA said. Takumi Nemoto, the minister for reconstruction, said one of his ministry's priorities is to ensure adequate human resources for medical and nursing care. He said the government would provide "home health guidance" and is strengthening health support for children.

The NRA also said risk communication needs to be addressed, with information on exposure and health collected and disseminated "in an easy-to-understand manner".

Evacuees suffer from isolation

March 11, 2014

3.11 survivors show deepened feelings of isolation: survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140311p2a00m0na023000c.html>

A follow-up survey of evacuees from the Great East Japan Earthquake disasters found deepened feelings of isolation as people leave temporary housing communities and reconstruction of pre-disaster communities lags.

In response to the question "Do you have someone besides family nearby who you can easily confide in," 20 percent answered "not at all" and 14 percent answered "not very much," for a combined 34 percent. The result suggests that even now, over one-third of the disaster victims are lacking communication with neighbors and feeling increasingly isolated. A survey one year after the disaster had only 28 percent of respondents answering in this way, showing the numbers have worsened rather than improved.

In response to the question "Are neighbors you had relations with before the disaster still nearby," the most common answer was "not at all," at 33 percent. Combined with "not very much," the total reaches 57 percent. Response to the same question was 55 percent in the survey taken one year after the disaster.

Teruo Nakajima, 78, of Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, is vice-chairman of a neighborhood committee at a temporary housing community. He wrote in his survey response that events where neighbors can gather have been the most fun part of living in temporary housing, but "more people are leaving temporary housing, and less people are participating" in those events.

Katsuo Suzuki, 66, of Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, wrote, "I'm most worried about isolation of the elderly. At temporary housing communities with many elderly residents, it is hard just to do a patrol of them all. Is there no effective measure that can be taken?"

Among residents of Fukushima Prefecture, where evacuation from the effects of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster continues, many of those surveyed expressed the difficulty of maintaining community ties. Masaru Suzuki, 46, of Iwaki in Fukushima Prefecture, who serves as chairman of a local

restoration committee, wrote, "We can't use the civic hall anymore, so it's difficult if we want to get 10 or more people together. Because of the Personal Information Protection Law, we don't know where residents have evacuated to, and it's very hard to get information out to all the residents."

More disaster survivors complained of physical and mental health problems. In response to a question on their health, 31 percent of respondents said they were in poor condition, a slight increase from the 29 percent that answered so in the survey one year after the disaster. Although 69 percent said they currently are not in poor health, that includes 21 percent of the total respondents who said they had at one time since the disaster been in poor condition. Many respondents complained of physical health problems from spending a long time living in evacuation, as well as anxiety from not being able to return to their pre-disaster lives.

Isamu Sato, 65, a fisherman in Yamada, Iwate Prefecture, wrote, "I don't know if it's because of the bad condensation and mold in my temporary housing, but when I get a cold it lasts a long time. It also wears on me having to be careful about making noise in my home. One year was bearable, but three is tough."

Eisaku Ishii, 68, a liquefied petroleum gas seller in Hirono, Fukushima Prefecture, wrote, "I got diabetes while living in evacuation. I also hurt both knees and can't sit on tatami mats anymore."

The anxiety of not seeing clear progress toward communities' recovery from the disaster can also bring on health issues. Mitsuru Saito, 70, of Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, wrote, "The city's plan to relocate communities to higher ground is slow coming together, and I've gotten (the disease) shingles."

Hiroshi Miura, 57, an inn manager in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, wrote, "Whenever I open the window in the morning, I am astonished by the difference of what I see compared to the pre-disaster landscape."

"I was in poor health for a while but have now recovered," wrote Mariko Aizawa, 31, who works in car sales in Ishinomaki. She added, "I lost my older brother and that was hard, but after learning how many people died, I've gradually become able to accept what happened."

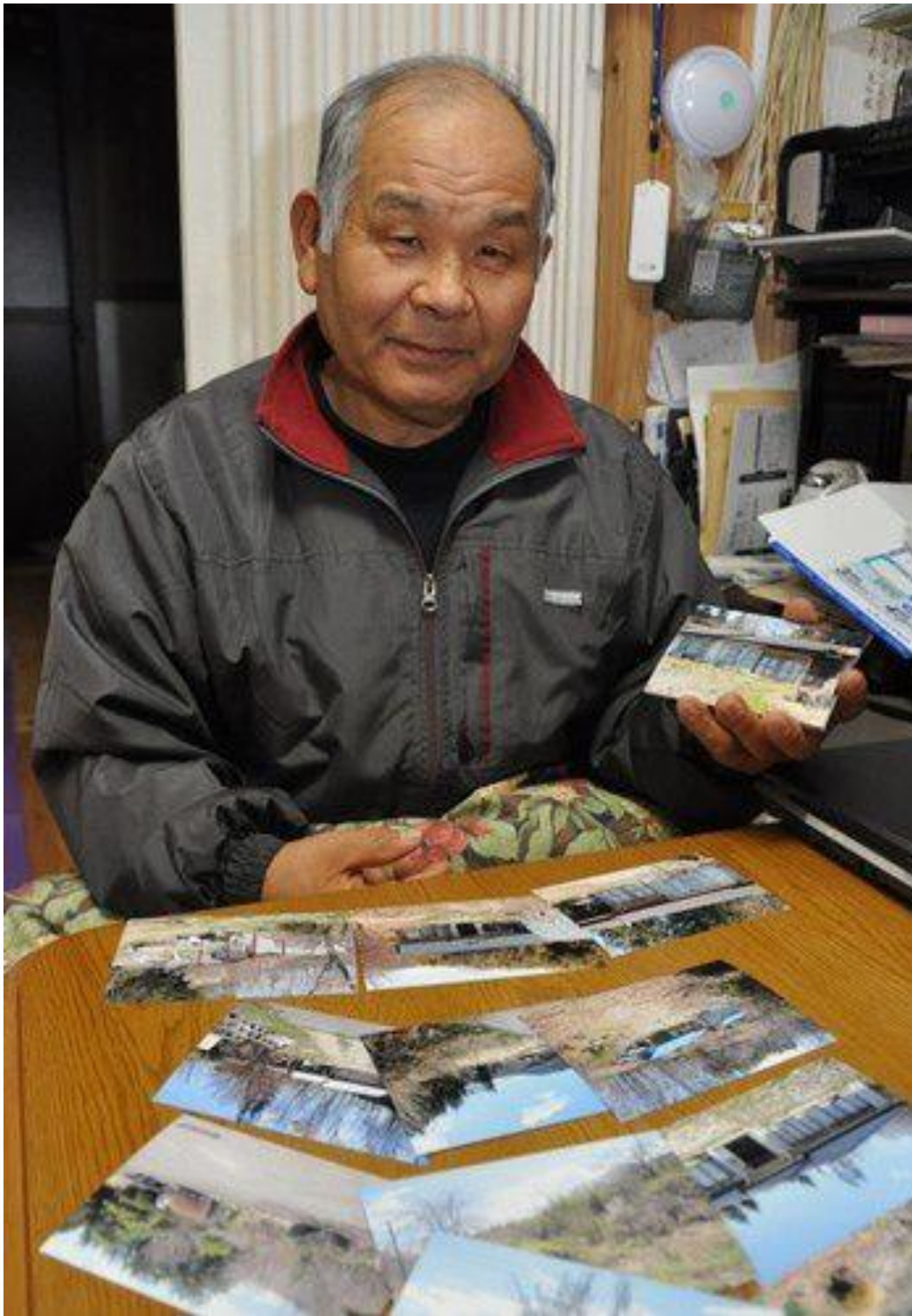
This was the seventh Mainichi survey of disaster evacuees, with 123 respondents this time. It was also the sixth Mainichi survey of disaster evacuees who evacuated out of their prefecture, who accounted for 105 of the current survey's respondents. The number of responses differed per survey question.

(Mainichi Japan)

Pictures of homes to pass down memories

March 11, 2014

Residents to create photo collection of evacuated homes in Fukushima



Yoshito Konno poses in front of the pictures he took in his hometown in the Akogi district of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, in this photograph taken at his temporary housing unit in the prefectural city of Nihonmatsu. (Mainichi) 拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140311p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Residents evacuated from a nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture town are producing a photo collection of their homes to pass down memories of their hometown, now designated as a "difficult-to-return" zone, to future generations.

The collection will carry pictures of all of the approximately 100 households in the Akogi district of Namie, whose 260 or so residents were evacuated to places including Hokkaido, the Tokyo metropolitan area and other parts of Fukushima Prefecture in the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

"We may no longer be able to return to our hometown, but I hope that younger generations who see the photo book could think about going back there dozens of years later," said Yoshito Konno, 69, chief administrator of the Akogi district, who hit upon the idea of producing the photo collection.

Konno himself has been evacuated to a temporary housing unit in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Nihonmatsu. "I just can't sit and ignore our hometown vanishing away," he told his fellow residents, which led to a decision to compile the photo collection in February last year.

Konno and six other administrators of the district photographed the vacated houses when they and their fellow residents were allowed to make a temporary return to their hometown.

The sight of his hometown being messy with overgrown greenery and damage by wild animals and birds made him think, "The situation is more pathetic rather than making me feel angry." Undaunted, Konno kept on clicking away his camera.

Organizers of the photo book are planning to assign two pages per household -- in which residents can carry pictures of their homes and neighborhood for all four seasons, memorable family photos taken prior to the March 2011 disaster, and essays written by representatives of each family about their thoughts on their hometown.

Already, organizers have received essays from around 70 percent of the households. One of the essays reads, "It's a wonderful area with enjoyment from season to season," while another reads, "The entire village was warmly connected through a family-like bond."

"It's important to keep passing down the scenery of our hometown and the thoughts of residents to future generations," said Konno, who believes the photo collection will serve as the first step toward reviving his hometown.

The photo collection is expected to be completed in about a year from now.
March 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Three years

Japan marks 3 years since quake-tsunami disasters, nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140311p2g00m0dm034000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan marked the third anniversary of the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami Tuesday with prayers for more than 18,000 people who died or remain missing in the catastrophe, which also triggered the world's worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Three years since the magnitude 9.0 quake, and ensuing tsunami and nuclear disaster in northeastern Japan, disaster-struck communities continue to struggle to come to terms with the loss of so many lives and properties, and many remain in temporary residences.

Memorial services were held across the country on Tuesday, with a moment of silence observed at 2:46 p.m. when the massive quake occurred, forcing the evacuation of about 470,000 people in the ensuing chaotic days.

Facing criticism from some disaster-affected people that reconstruction work is slow, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe vowed at a government-sponsored memorial ceremony at the National Theater in Tokyo to speed up rebuilding efforts.

At the ceremony with about 1,200 attendees, Abe said, "Taking to heart the valuable lessons we learned from the challenges of the massive earthquake, we hereby pledge to create a nation that has a strong degree of resilience to disasters."

Emperor Akihito, with Empress Michiko by his side, said at the same ceremony, "It is important for people to be united and support each other so that the people affected by the disasters can live without losing hope."

Representing people who lost family members in Miyagi Prefecture, Katsuo Izumi, 69, said, "Our mission as survivors is to live to the fullest for the people who died."

Mikiko Asanuma, the 50-year-old representative of bereaved kin in Iwate Prefecture, vowed to tell future generations what happened in 2011, while 27-year-old Yukari Tanaka, who comes from Fukushima Prefecture, said she will never forget the tragedy.

Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima are the three hardest-hit northeastern prefectures. Survivors in these areas have visited graves and other locations throughout the day to pray for their families and friends.

The disaster killed 15,884 people -- many from drowning as tsunami over 20 meters high swallowed vast swaths of coastal towns and villages. Another 2,633 people remained missing as of Monday, according to the National Police Agency.

Police and the Japan Coast Guard conducted search operations Tuesday for remains of the missing along the shores of the Pacific coast in the hard-hit areas where relatives cling to hope of recovering the bodies of loved ones.

Japan also continues to grapple with radioactive contamination from the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, devastated by a series of hydrogen explosions and nuclear reactor core meltdowns after the quake and tsunami knocked out power to critical safety systems.

The nuclear crisis continues and has triggered a nationwide debate on the safety of nuclear power, which used to provide a third of the electricity consumed in Japan, the world's third-largest economy.

In the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie, located in what remains a no-entry zone due to radiation released by the damaged plant, 33 residents remain missing.

"I want to help as much as possible in finding clues," said Yoko Yoshida, 63, who joined the search for the missing.

In Tokyo about 100 people, including people affected by the Fukushima crisis, staged a protest in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry by releasing 300 red balloons with the words "No to nuclear power" in Japanese.

Among them was Sachiko Kameya, a 68-year-old resident of the Fukushima town of Futaba who now lives as an evacuee in Tokyo.

"I want the state to make efforts so that our lives will soon be back to normal," said Kameya.

In a vivid reminder of how the Great East Japan Earthquake, one of the most powerful quakes on record in Japan, and the ensuing tsunami have displaced people, about 267,000 are still living in temporary housing and other makeshift residences nationwide, partly due to the slow progress in building public housing for disaster victims.

More than 3,000 people have also died since the disasters from stress-related factors including suicide, with many of those fatalities among people living in evacuation centers.

As of Feb. 13 according to statistics compiled by the Reconstruction Agency, 47,995 people from Fukushima continue to take refuge outside the prefecture, where the Fukushima plant devastated by explosions and meltdowns is located.

Despite the Japanese government's declaration in late 2011 that the nuclear crisis is under control, public anxiety is high in the wake of recent leaks of highly toxic water from radioactive water storage tanks at the plant, as Tokyo Electric Power Co. struggles to manage the massive volume of radioactive water.

All 48 of the commercial reactors in Japan are now offline, but the government wants to resume operation of reactors that satisfy new safety regulations despite strong opposition.

Drawing lessons from the catastrophe, Iwate's tsunami-hit city of Miyako held an evacuation drill under the scenario of a tsunami following a magnitude 9.0 quake off Aomori Prefecture.

"I hope we will continue to conduct these drills so that we will not forget the disaster," said 82-year-old Tamiko Hatakeyama, who joined the drill.

The government has allocated a budget of 25 trillion yen for reconstruction for the five-year period from fiscal 2011, up from 19 trillion yen, but the road to reconstruction appears to be long.

Recovery still far from being reality

March 11, 2014

Editorial: Full recovery from 3.11 still a long way away

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140311p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Three years have passed since the triple disasters that began with the Great East Japan Earthquake, which left 18,520 people dead or missing. Rebuilding work is making some progress in areas hit by the tsunami, but overall recovery of the disaster areas is still far from being a reality. Today, some 267,000 evacuees primarily from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures are still unable to return home due to effects of the tsunami and the ongoing nuclear disaster. On this three-year anniversary, we must once again look at this reality head on.

The reality faced by Fukushima is particularly harsh. Approximately half of the evacuees from the triple disasters are Fukushima Prefectural residents. Another disturbing figure is that of disaster-related deaths -- resulting not directly from the tsunami or quake, but from prolonged evacuation conditions. Such deaths have topped 1,600 in Fukushima, a figure that surpasses the number of direct deaths from the disaster in that prefecture, and is far greater than the 800-plus and 400-plus disaster-related deaths to date in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, respectively.

The suffering of the people of Fukushima is immeasurable: a bleak, ongoing battle against radiation, anxieties and fears over returning home, and the despair of losing one's hometown. We seek the fulfillment of the national government's declaration in December 2013 that it would speed up reconstruction work in Fukushima.

Nearly 400 residents from the prefectural town of Futaba live in the Minamidai Temporary Housing facility in the mountains of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. In Futaba, one of two towns that the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant straddles, 96 percent of all land is designated areas in which residents will likely be unable to return.

Merely walking across the floor makes the prefab housing facility units creak, and it's obvious when someone in a neighboring unit gets up in the morning. Soichi Saito, 64, who is chairman of the neighborhood association, says such living conditions carry with them heavy emotional burdens.

"Everyone has a lot of stress pent up inside," he said. "If someone's quarreling, you inevitably hear words you don't want to."

In Fukushima Prefecture, at least 28,000 people are still living in temporary housing facilities. We must quickly resolve the issue of evacuees living in small and crude temporary housing units to prevent further disaster-related deaths and solitary deaths -- which became a major problem following the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake.

The construction of public rental housing for disaster victims by prefectural governments has been delayed due to various obstacles, including difficulties in securing land plots. In the face of such circumstances, the national and prefectural governments should first help establish somewhat "normal" living environments for evacuees by taking steps such as renting private housing for their use. Another major task is caring for residents' physical and emotional health.

In policy guidelines set down late last year, the national government announced a reversal to its original plan to eventually return all Fukushima residents to their respective hometowns. Hereafter, residents of municipalities that are believed to remain uninhabitable for a long time will be offered additional compensation and encouraged to move elsewhere permanently.

However, this does not mean that the municipal governments and residents of such areas have completely given up on going back. The Futaba Municipal Government is hoping to establish a "provisional town" to maintain a sense of community by setting up social welfare and commercial facilities in Iwaki. Furthermore, a Futaba municipal kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school that had been closed temporarily after the disasters will be reopened in spring of this year.

Although there will only be nine children and students, the development offers a ray of hope to Futaba residents.

The town of Futaba is a candidate for the mid-term storage of radiation-contaminated waste resulting from decontamination work, but the final goal of reconstruction is to enable residents to return and the revival of the town. The problems faced by the cities, towns and villages close to the nuclear plant vary from municipality to municipality. Even within the same municipality, residents from one district may have a very different outlook to residents from another. For example, it was recently announced that the evacuation order for the town of Tamura's Miyakoji district will be lifted on April 1, but residents' reactions have been split over concerns regarding decontamination.

The national government must carefully and respectfully explain its vision for what the municipalities will look like after they are rebuilt and how they'll get there. From there, it must listen to input from the residents and respond in a meticulous, detailed manner.

Stabilizing the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, where radioactive water continues to leak every day, is, of course, a precondition for all of this. Residents continue to harbor great fears toward radiation, as we still do not know how long-term low-level exposure to radiation affects human health.

Multiple public opinion polls have shown that the number of Fukushima residents who feel anxious about radiation exceeds that of those who are not very concerned. To address this reality, authorities must step up their efforts, through such measures as distributing personal dosimeters and reducing the effects of radiation by improving living environments.

The national government must also take responsibility for the lack of progress in decontamination. The decontamination of 11 municipalities designated as no-go zones are being carried out under the direct jurisdiction of the national government, but their completion, which had been planned for this month, is expected to be moved back significantly. The national government has also drawn complaints for leaving the administration of residential decontamination in other areas -- albeit funded by the national government -- to municipalities. The national government must present an appropriate timeline and exercise leadership in getting the work done.

The national and prefectural governments are encouraging residents of former no-go areas that have been deemed safe to live in to return to their hometowns. Ultimately, however, we must respect the residents' decisions. Assistance must be offered to those who, unable to decide whether to return or to permanently move elsewhere, choose to stay in evacuation for the time being, so that they, too, can live comfortably.

The return rate of residents to the village of Kawauchi and the town of Hirono, where government-imposed evacuation orders were lifted approximately two years ago, is about 20 to 25 percent. We need reliable plans toward securing safe environments for children to live in, that will allow people who want to return home to do so without fear.

Based on guidelines laid out by the science and technology ministry's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, one objective of compensation payments for disaster victims is encouraging their independence. However, Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has taken a significantly passive approach to victim compensation.

The alternative dispute resolution (ADR) program set up within the committee mediates between disaster victims and TEPCO, but there have been reports of TEPCO resisting or refusing settlement proposals. Because the settlements are not legally binding, if one party refuses to adhere to the conditions, there is no choice but to take the case to court. However, protracted legal battles pose a large burden on disaster victims. TEPCO should respect the settlements that come out of the mediation process.

The fisheries and agricultural industries in parts of the Tohoku and Kanto regions affected by the disaster have suffered from consumer fears that products are contaminated with radiation. Reviving such local industries can help propel the revival of entire communities. Every one of us Japanese must cooperate in nipping any obstacles to recovery in the bud.

March 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Restoring hundreds of thousands lost photos

March 12, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Photographer restores 750,000 pictures thought lost in 2011 disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201403120004>

By YU YAMADA/ Staff Writer

Munemasa Takahashi has restored and returned 340,000 photos that were washed away by the 2011 tsunami to their rightful and grateful owners.

Takahashi, 33, a freelance photographer first thought that building houses for victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami was paramount. However, he soon realized he could use his photography skills to improve the lives of those affected by the disaster in other ways.

After seeing people rejoice when they were reconnected with their photos, he became aware that “regaining their photos is regaining their past.”

Most of the photos he has restored were collected by the Self-Defense Forces who were sent to the town of Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, on support and clean-up missions.

Takahashi’s project has restored an estimated 750,000 photos, and he is still seeking to return more than half of that number to their owners.

Extreme care is necessary because wet photographs are easily damaged, he said. After he soaks the photos in water and then gently removes the mud with a brush, he takes digitized photographs of each and enters them into a database so people can easily search for them.

Friends and acquaintances have donated cameras and tripods to Takahashi's project. He in turn has taught volunteers the proper techniques on how to make copies of the photos.

Takahashi spent a year traveling to seven cities in four countries, where he exhibited some of the photos that were so damaged that it was difficult to identify the people in the pictures.

He said some of the people who came to his shows wept after viewing the exhibit.

"Photos such as those held by any family helped the visitors imagine that people like them were living in the affected areas. The photos had such power," he said.

In February this year, he authored a book on his project. The book is titled "Tsunami, Photographs, and Then," and was published by Tokyo-based Akaaka Art Publishing Inc.

In the book, he describes in both Japanese and English how to clean photos. That way, his methods can be used to help others in disaster-hit areas overseas.

He hit upon the idea after the exhibition in New York when one person asked him how to restore photos that suffered water damage from a hurricane.

Takahashi will donate the royalties from the book to the town of Yamamoto.

Listen to what the people have to say about reconstruction

March 11, 2014

EDITORIAL: Residents' views should come first in Tohoku reconstruction work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201403110035>

Three years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, many people are lamenting the slow progress in efforts to rebuild the disaster areas.

Myriad problems are hampering the work: bureaucratic sectionalism, difficulty in securing necessary land plots and serious shortages of construction workers and materials.

Some residents in the affected areas, however, have called for a halt to projects that the central and local governments are racing to carry out, even though they are aware their actions will delay the reconstruction of their communities.

Why have they done so?

STUDY GROUP BY WORRIED RESIDENTS

Early this month in Kesenuma, a coastal city in Miyagi Prefecture, a small meeting of local residents was held, with discussions focused on the proposed construction of a tide embankment.

The residents remain saddened over the fact that the tsunami left more than 1,400 Kesenuma citizens dead or missing. But at the same time they are concerned that the planned embankment could have a negative impact on the two key local industries--fisheries and tourism.

“Some people say the tide embankment should be as high as possible, but the city’s slogan is ‘Living with the sea,’” Kiyoshi Morita, a doctor, said at the meeting. “I’m not sure if an embankment that is too high is good (for the city).”

“We naturally hesitate to argue that we don’t need an embankment in front of people who have lost their family members,” said Kazue Takahashi, president of a local company selling kimono accessories. “But if an embankment is built, our offspring would have to shoulder the heavy costs of necessary maintenance and future reconstruction. What if only a dilapidated concrete structure that cannot really protect (the coast communities) from waves is left behind?”

Many of the people who spoke at the meeting are members of a group set up by local residents in summer 2012, slightly more than a year after the disaster, to study issues related to the planned embankment.

At that time, the Miyagi prefectural government was holding meetings in each district to explain the embankment project. Residents, who were preoccupied with the struggle to rebuild their shattered lives, mostly remained silent at such meetings while listening to prefectural officials use jargon-filled language to explain the project.

The prefectural government tried to go ahead with the project, saying no objection was raised in these briefing sessions.

Alarmed by the situation, some citizens led by Akihiko Sugawara, a member of the Kesenuma Chamber of Commerce and Industry, established a volunteer group to discuss the embankment plan. Nearly 30 people, including local fishermen, merchants, business owners and members of nonprofit organizations, added their names to the list of promoters.

NOT AN EITHER-OR CHOICE

The members of the new group thought that outright debate on the appropriateness of the plan would cause a rift among residents. In the first place, they had no knowledge about tide embankments, so they decided to put aside the issue of whether to support the plan and learn from the local administrative officials in charge and various experts.

The group gained a wide range of knowledge.

Only four months after the disaster, the central government decided on procedures for determining details of new embankment plans, such as the maximum scale of assumed tsunami and the heights of proposed embankments.

Based on past data and technical calculations, the Miyagi prefectural government decided on the heights of new tide embankments that should be built within the prefecture. For Kesenuma, tide embankments as tall as several meters to 10-odd meters were needed, according to the prefectural government.

A higher embankment would increase the safety against tsunami. However, if such a new levee leads to a decline of key local industries, it would become impossible for children and grandchildren of current Kesenuma residents to continue living in the city.

Members of the study group discussed the likely opinions of residents as well as what should be protected.

It was clearly difficult to achieve a complete consensus. Study group members thought this issue should not be decided simply by a majority vote. They also believed it was not a matter of merely saying “yes” or “no” to the embankment.

They tried to reach a decision that was acceptable to as many citizens as possible.

The group decided to develop an alternative plan to be presented to the prefectural government and asked for ideas from the public. Group members thought that widening the scope of options and narrowing down the list would lead to a decision based at least on an understanding of the affected individuals.

In August and September 2013, the group held direct talks with Miyagi Governor Yoshihiro Murai, who argued for building an embankment according to the prefectural government's plan. While the two sides failed to iron out their differences, they at least agreed to continue exploring various ideas.

In January this year, a final proposal was presented to build the embankment in the Naiwan district, located at the inner Kesenuma Bay, which is a geographic symbol of the city.

The original plan called for a 5-meter-high embankment all along the coast of the Naiwan inlet. But the final plan calls for an embankment that leaves part of the coastline open and the creation of a park on the embankment with a commanding view of the sea.

In some other parts, movable metal flap gates that are raised when a tsunami warning is issued will be used to reduce the height of the embankment in normal times.

The prefectural government has also revised its embankment plans for two beaches on Oshima island off the city in response to opposition from the local communities. It takes 20 minutes to go from the Naiwan district to the island by ship.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

But only a small number of such changes have been made to original plans in response to objections from local residents.

Municipal governments and communities are worried that opposition to prefectural or central government plans could result in budget cuts. They are also concerned that any significant delay in the embankment project would lead to a suspension of construction of fishing facilities.

Construction work is already under way for nearly 70 percent of about 90 embankment projects for Kesenuma, according to the municipal government.

Rebuilding damaged communities is not a simple challenge. After the removal last autumn of a large fishing boat that had been carried by the tsunami to an inland area of the city, the number of tourist buses to Kesenuma fell sharply. This episode underscores the complicated nature of the challenge.

Still, Sugawara, who has become head of the city's chamber of commerce and industry, takes a positive view about the effects of the efforts made by the study group.

"The process of discussing the embankment plan itself will serve as a foundation for the efforts to rebuild the city," he said.

Reconstructing disaster-hit areas will be a drawn-out process. Progress has stalled in various areas, and in some cases, government-proposed measures are out of sync with the wishes of the residents.

In other cases, consensus among residents cannot be reached because of conflicts of interest.

The lesson to be gleaned from Kesenuma's efforts is the importance of "responsibility for future generations" and "understanding of the local residents living now."

To ensure these viewpoints receive the attention they deserve, it is necessary for each individual to think about related issues and try to find common ground among residents, instead of leaving everything to the government.

This is a challenge that is also confronting many areas that were not affected by the disaster but are grappling with problems of an aging population and a fiscal squeeze.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 11

Tokyo has forgotten Tohoku

March 11, 2014

Japanese jingoism won't help Fukushima's refugees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/03/11/commentary/japanese-jingoism-wont-help-fukushimas-refugees/#.UyB9pIXrV1t>

by William Pesek
Bloomberg

Does Shinzo Abe love soldiers who died during World War II more than Japanese living today?

The question might sound disrespectful. But I can't help asking it as I survey the placards at anti-government rallies commemorating the third anniversary of the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami, which left almost 20,000 people dead or missing and erased entire towns. "Abe is AWOL," says one. Another: "Nationalism Doesn't Create Jobs!" The one that moved me most was carried by a 30-something mother wearing a "No Nukes" T-shirt: "My Kids Still Can't Play Outside."

After 1,095 days, untold billions of dollars of public expenditures and countless pledges to accelerate rebuilding efforts, radiation is still leaking at Fukushima. Only 3.4 percent of planned public-housing projects are close to being completed.

A whole generation of kids in the northeast Tohoku region are tested regularly for thyroid cancer. They can barely remember anything but temporary housing, and must wonder if outdoor playgrounds really exist.

If Prime Minister Abe spent even a fraction of his time helping tsunami-devastated towns and Fukushima's nuclear refugees instead of fighting with Japan's neighbors over history, Tohoku citizens would be much better off. Unfair criticism? Abe's image-makers certainly think so; they play up his 13 visits to Tohoku since December 2012.

Face it: These obligatory jaunts up north are nothing more than disaster porn. This has become an unfortunate part of the global news playbook. Celebrity journalists parachute into danger zones, stand amid rubble and corpses, and repeat the words "unspeakable tragedy" in an endless 24-hour loop. Politicians are hardly less cynical. Photo ops with local government officials, displaced families and children grieving for lost classmates may score big points down in Tokyo. But they do nothing on the ground.

The official reason for the glacial pace of reconstruction is a shortage of labor, building materials and bids from the construction industry. **The real problem is that the Tokyo political establishment has largely forgotten about Tohoku.**

Although Abe inherited this problem, his blinders seem to be growing in size with each passing month. His direct predecessor, Yoshihiko Noda, also made frequent visits to Tohoku, as did Naoto Kan before him. How is it that a nation known for hyperefficiency, one that surged from the ashes of World War II to threaten U.S. economic dominance for a time, could fail at so obvious a task? Chronic inattention.

Daunting as it is, the scale of the problem is no longer an acceptable excuse for abandoning 100,000 people in temporary accommodations that are cold, spartan and devoid of privacy. Let's take the government at its word that it's having difficulty attracting builders — just offer them more money. Abe's team claims there's a labor shortage, something they should've considered before lobbying for the 2020 Olympics. Why not import 10,000 construction workers from elsewhere in Asia? The ends would justify the means in a nation that suffers from a shrinking workforce. And the jolt provided by big new projects could give the economy a welcome boost.

Yes, Japan is bureaucratic, and these things take time. But Abe, who enjoys a majority in both houses of the Diet, has had 62 weeks to get his Cabinet members, lawmakers and reconstruction officials into a room together to cut red tape and demand action; 440 days to ease the pain of those still reeling from what Japanese call "3/11"; 10,560 hours to demand that the Liberal Democratic Party's construction-industry cronies, who have made huge profits clearing away debris, do more to rebuild and decontaminate areas around Fukushima to acceptable levels.

Abe had enough time to visit Buenos Aires to reassure the International Olympic Committee that Fukushima's radiation was "under control." His schedule has included trips to Turkey and India to sell nuclear technology on behalf of Japan Inc. The prime minister's itinerary takes him to places as diverse as Ireland, Malaysia, Mozambique, Oman and even Wall Street to convey that "Japan is back" and ready to assume a renewed leadership role in Asia.

But the government's inability to handle its crisis at home belies its global ambitions. Time that should be allotted to sorting out Tohoku is squandered debating World War II atrocities, teaching "patriotism" to school kids, staffing national broadcaster NHK with like-minded conservatives and defending a prime ministerial visit to Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, where the souls of 14 Class-A war criminals are enshrined among the war dead. Abe seems to believe Japan has been victimized by history. So why is he ignoring Japan's current victims?

For a leader who cloaks his most controversial policies in an aura of patriotism, Abe has a strange way of showing his love for Japan. An area that's home to more than 9 million Japanese could use more affection — and attention — from Tokyo.

Like myself, Tohoku residents could be excused for wondering why a bunch of dead soldiers appear to hold more fascination for Abe than they do.

Warning of gigantic tsunami should have been issued

March 13, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Man sues over failures in 3/11 tsunami warnings

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201403130027

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--A man who lost his wife in the 2011 disaster has filed a lawsuit seeking compensation for what he claims were failures in the tsunami warning system.

According to Toshiyuki Omori, 63, the understated tsunami warning issued by the Japan Meteorological Agency is to blame for the inability of his wife, Sachiko, to flee in time.

He is seeking a total of 60 million yen (\$583,000) in compensation from the central and municipal governments.

The lawsuit dated March 10 was filed in the Morioka District Court. It is the first lawsuit that calls into question the warning systems that were in place at the time of the disaster generated by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Omori, who used to run a soba restaurant here, says that clarifying the reasons behind the understated tsunami warnings will lead to improvements that could prevent future loss of life.

According to the lawsuit, at 2:49 p.m. on March 11, 2011, three minutes after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake struck, the Meteorological Agency issued a warning that predicted a 3-meter tsunami hitting the coast of Iwate Prefecture.

Omori's wife died at their home, which was located about 2 kilometers from the coast.

The disaster preparedness PA system set up by the Rikuzentakata municipal government informed residents about the tsunami warning. However, a blackout at the local fire station left communications equipment inoperable, so they did not receive a subsequent warning from the Meteorological Agency at 3:14 p.m. that predicted a 6-meter tsunami. As a result, residents were not informed about the possibility of a larger tsunami striking.

Omori is calling into question the Meteorological Agency's assessment of the likely size of the tsunami despite the fact that seismograph needles went beyond what the equipment was capable of handling.

"The agency should have issued a warning that said there was the possibility of an unprecedented gigantic tsunami striking," Omori said.

He named the municipal government as a defendant because of its insufficient maintenance of its fire station equipment.

According to the Rikuzentakata municipal government's report about evacuation after the quake and tsunami, the tsunami that struck the city was about 14 meters high.

"I believe there were many people who were slow in evacuating because they heard the understated warning," Omori said. "This is not a matter that can be put aside with such words as 'beyond the scope of assumptions' or 'unparalleled.'"

An official with the Meteorological Agency said, "We cannot comment because we have not yet read the lawsuit."

An official with the Rikuzentakata municipal government also said no response could be made because the city was not yet aware of the contents of the lawsuit.

The initial 3-meter tsunami warning for Iwate Prefecture was based on the estimated magnitude of 7.9 that was calculated from the seismographs set up around Japan.

The early-measurement system in place at the time, which issued preliminary magnitude estimates in about three minutes, was unable to calculate any quake above magnitude-8.0.

The more accurate system that calculated magnitude in about 15 minutes also did not function because the needles on 19 of the 21 advanced seismographs went beyond what the equipment was capable of handling.

Using offshore wave gauges, the expected tsunami heights for Iwate and Fukushima prefectures were revised from 3 meters to 6 meters at 3:14 p.m. The tsunami height for Miyagi Prefecture was revised from 6 meters to more than 10 meters.

It was not until 3:31 p.m. that the Meteorological Agency revised the tsunami height for all three prefectures to more than 10 meters.

That revised warning came after the tsunami struck the coast of all three prefectures.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Meteorological Agency installed 80 seismographs around Japan capable of measuring even earthquakes of magnitude-9.0. New water pressure gauges have also been installed off the Pacific coast to more accurately predict the height of expected tsunami.

Tsunami warnings have also been changed from reporting expected heights to simply announcing a "gigantic" or "large" tsunami is expected.

(This article was compiled from reports by Kazumasa Sugimura, Toru Saito and Tomoya Ishikawa.)

Closing schools in Fukushima Pref.

March 13, 2014

March 13, 2014 THREE YEARS AFTER: 7 schools to close doors due to Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201403130040>

By TETSUYA KASAI/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Seven elementary and junior high schools in Fukushima Prefecture will become the first public ones to close as a consequence of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Thirty-eight elementary and junior high schools from 10 municipalities relocated outside the evacuation zones after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The schools lost 80 percent of the 7,681 students they had before the disaster. But until now, the municipalities kept them open because officials feared the loss of the children who were to support their communities.

In the Tabito district of Iwaki, 60 kilometers southwest of the crippled plant, 105 children were studying at seven elementary and junior high schools in fiscal 2010.

In fiscal 2014, which starts from April 1, only 55 will attend one elementary school and one junior high school, which will take the place of three elementary schools and two junior high schools, respectively.

An Iwaki official said many families who originally migrated there from the Tokyo metropolitan area have left the prefecture due to radiation concerns.

Mano Elementary School in Minami-Soma, 30 km north of the plant, will be merged into a nearby school after the number of pupils dropped to 43 from a pre-quake number of 75.

In addition, Onami Elementary School in Fukushima, 60 km northwest of the plant, will be closed in fiscal 2014. In June 2011, an annualized air radiation dose of 16.3 millisieverts was detected in the schoolyard, the highest among the 1,729 education facilities in the prefecture.

The dose dropped below the government goal of 1 millisievert after decontamination work was carried out, but the number of pupils fell from 30 in fiscal 2011 to only one in fiscal 2013.

Unlike the six other schools, which will be delisted, Onami Elementary School may reopen in the future.

Elsewhere in Fukushima Prefecture, schools are struggling to keep their children.

The town of Futaba will reopen three elementary and junior high schools in temporary facilities in Iwaki in April despite just having a total of seven students. There were 551 children before the quake.

The town of Tomioka and the village of Katsurao have reopened three elementary schools in Miharu since September 2011, but no first-graders are expected to join in April.

According to the prefectural education board, there were 12,648 students who were forced to evacuate and study elsewhere in and outside the prefecture as of May 1, little changed from the 13,286 reported in September 2011.

TEPCO vows to restore Fukushima

March 13, 2014

TEPCO chief vows to reconstruct Fukushima amid low trust in nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140312p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) President Naomi Hirose said on March 11 that the beleaguered utility firm would do its best to restore Fukushima, plagued by the ongoing nuclear crisis at the tsunami-crippled nuclear power station over the last three years.

Hirose and other TEPCO employees observed a minute of silence at 2:46 p.m., the time when the magnitude-9 Great East Japan Earthquake struck the country's northeast three years ago. "We must not forget the hardships the disaster victims have been experiencing away from home and make efforts to reconstruct Fukushima." Despite his all-out pledge, however, there is a rough road ahead to regain public trust in the company as there are multitudes of problems that need to be resolved, including the problem of the leakage of water contaminated with radioactive substances.

After observing a minute of silence with 100 workers at a quake-proof emergency building on the premises of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, Hirose gave instructions through monitoring screens to 50 employees at TEPCO's Fukushima reconstruction headquarters in the Fukushima prefecture towns of Naraha and Hirono, as well as to about 170 employees at its Tokyo headquarters. "Fukushima's clock, which stopped ticking, will start moving again only if we take positive action toward reconstruction. Let us get united and do our best!," Hirose said.

TEPCO has been conducting work at its Fukushima reconstruction headquarters set up in January 2013 to pay compensation. In its new business turnaround plan worked out in January this year, TEPCO said, "The company will fulfill its responsibility to pay compensation, decommission the nuclear power plant and restore Fukushima." The total amount of compensation paid by TEPCO increased to 3.53 trillion yen as of March 7, 2014, from 1.66 trillion yen the company had paid until March 31, 2013. The central government has decided to increase its financial assistance to TEPCO from 5 trillion yen to 9 trillion yen, a move that could help accelerate decontamination work.

TEPCO plans to strengthen its structure to deal with the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station by spinning off its decommission and decontamination projects in April. Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi voiced hope on March 11 that TEPCO would take necessary measures swiftly,

saying at a news conference, "Through the in-house spin-off, the company plans to secure the structure to decommission the nuclear power plant and deal with contaminated water." But a number of problems remain to be resolved because of the insecure situation caused by such issues as repeated leakages of contaminated water.

Concerns about seawalls

March 12, 2014

Japan's first lady concerned about gov't-led seawall construction in disaster areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140312p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Japan's first lady Akie Abe has been active in supporting the 2011 disaster-hit areas and affected residents ever since the Great East Japan Earthquake, visiting the tsunami-ravaged Tohoku region on multiple occasions. She has been raising her voice since last fall to review a seawall construction project the national government is preparing. Abe's husband Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also referred to the project's possible review in a March 10 Diet session. The Mainichi Shimbun recently interviewed the first lady on her intention to oppose the massive seawall construction project.

Question: Why are you pushing for a review on the government-led seawall construction project?

Answer: I began to have concerns about the project around June last year and have met people who are also worried about it through my visits to Kesenuma (a coastal city in Miyagi Prefecture). I spoke at the Liberal Democratic Party's environmental committee in December last year and also have held forums on the issue in Kesenuma.

From what I have learned through research, the planned seawall does not completely protect coastal municipalities from waves. While I do understand that seawalls need to have a certain height, I couldn't see how standards for the size of the construction were decided. The massive seawalls would work against local needs by destroying an ecosystem and creating unattractive areas where people can't see the ocean. They are costly and I don't think the government should build what is more than necessary.

Q: How did your meeting last month with Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai -- who is promoting the project -- go?

A: I didn't intend to campaign against the project. I just wanted to tell him that I hoped he would carry out disaster recovery work for the benefit of locals, but we were not on the same page. Gov. Murai told me that he had seen many people who lost their families and friends in front of their eyes and that he doesn't want his people to ever go through that again. He emphasized the need for the seawall project.

I said to him, "Not everyone agrees with the project. Even if the seawalls offer safety to towns, it would be meaningless if they became unappealing to young people and drove them out of the towns." I also asked him to listen to what the young have to say about the project. I'm hoping to hold a forum in April in Sendai to provide an opportunity for people to discuss the issue.

Q: Have you heard of any local residents who want the seawalls?

A: I personally haven't. Municipal governments may have requested the project, but I'm not sure if any individual who was affected by the tsunami has asked for it. I suspect the construction plan was never thoroughly debated among locals. I don't think the prefectural government would have approved it if the cost of the project had to be covered by the prefecture's budget. It might be possible that the prefectural government cannot see the most important issue because the cost for the seawall project will be covered by the national government.

The same logic can be applied to nuclear power plant projects. Even though there are those who oppose such undertakings, depopulated towns have no choice but to accept the project as it brings financial benefits to the community.

Q: Do you think municipal governments have accepted reconstruction projects mapped out by the national government rather than taking local needs into consideration?

A: The other day, I met with students at Kita Junior High School in Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture, who have been in touch with the disaster-hit Minato Junior High School in the Miyagi Prefecture city of Ishinomaki. The Aichi students asked those in Ishinomaki what they needed after the disaster and collected about 800,000 yen with support from local residents and used the money to buy equipment for school clubs. It's not much money, but that was important for the Miyagi school and students can continue their school club activities thanks to the donation.

When I heard that story, I couldn't help but compare it with the seawall project that is said to cost 800 billion yen to a trillion yen. I've been married to a politician for a long time, but it was the first time I noticed that sort of thing. The seawall project had opened my eyes.

Q: How will you participate in disaster recovery?

A: I think we should work not only on disaster recovery in the affected areas but also on creating a diverse society. Community planning should not aim at creating a "small Tokyo" in every part of the country, but should make full use of characteristics unique to each community. If there is one thing

particular to that community, it attracts people. Agriculture can be that special attraction and many young people are interested in that area.

I'm not sure how long my husband will be in office, but when he resigns, I'm hoping to include farming in my lifestyle.

I hope those who have found interest in volunteer work after working for the disaster-affected areas would support each other like helping out neighboring countries when they are in need of assistance. (Interview by Yasuo Yoshinaga and Tetsuya Kageyama, Political News Department)

See also:

EDITORIAL: Residents' views should come first in Tohoku reconstruction work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201403110035>

Fukushima suicides on the rise

March 13, 2014

Suicides drop for 4th straight year in 2013; disaster-related suicides rise in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140313p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Japan marked the fourth-straight year of a decline in the number of suicides in the country, but recorded an increase in suicides related to the Great East Japan Earthquake, according to a report.

The National Police Agency and the Cabinet Office released the report on March 13 that showed 27,283 suicides in 2013, a drop of 575, or 2.1 percent, from the previous year. It was the second year in a row for the figure to fall below 30,000, but it was still above the government's goal of less than 25,000.

By motive, the largest drop in suicides was seen over economic and lifestyle problems like heavy debt or poor business performances, at 583. The Cabinet Office speculates that "Economic recovery may have been a large reason (for the drop)."

Meanwhile, there were 38 suicides in 2013 judged by police to have been related to the Great East Japan Earthquake, 14 more than in the previous year.

In fiscal 2009, the national government set up prefectural funds to combat suicide. By fiscal 2012, 11.84 billion yen from the funds had been applied to suicide-prevention activities by municipal governments and private organizations. A Cabinet Office official said, "There has been some effect" from the funds.

Of the suicides in 2013, 68.9 percent were male. Around 60 percent were unemployed, which did not include students. By age, people in their 60s were the most common, at 17.3 percent. Next were people in their 40s, at 16.8 percent, in their 50s at 16.4 percent and in their 70s at 13.9 percent. For 2012, all age groups showed a decline in the number of suicides, but for 2013 an increase was seen for those aged 70 and over.

Police could determine motives from wills and other sources for 20,256 suicides. Using a maximum of three motives per suicide as a basis, the most common motive was health issues, at 13,680 suicides, a 0.4 percent increase from 2012; followed by economic or lifestyle issues, at 4,636 suicides, a 11.2 percent drop; family issues at 3,930 suicides, a 3.9 percent decline; work issues like problems with colleagues at 2,323, a 6 percent fall; male-female relations at 912, a 11.9 percent drop; and school issues including bullying or poor grades at 375, a 10.1 percent decline.

Regarding the most common motive, health issues, the largest increase in suicides was seen for people suffering from schizophrenia, with an increase of 115 suicides, or 10 percent. For economic and lifestyle issues, the largest fall was for people with heavy debt, at a decrease of 151 suicides, or 17 percent. In particular, the declines were large for people in their 40s and 60s. For people in their 20s, the largest drop was among those who failed to find employment, at 45 people, or 30 percent.

While 2013 saw a jump in quake-related suicides, 2012 had seen a halving of such suicides from the 55 in 2011, which was only for the latter half of that year. The most common motive in these quake-related suicides was health problems, at 22 deaths. Fukushima Prefecture had 23 disaster-related suicides, a jump of 10 from 2012.

March 13, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Suicides tied to 2011 disaster rise in 2013, worsen in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140313p2g00m0dm069000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Police linked 37 suicides in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures in 2013 to the March 2011 disaster, up 13 from a year earlier, with the tally rising progressively each year in Fukushima, the National Police Agency said Thursday.

The results of the three prefectures hardest hit by the quake and tsunami, with the nuclear crisis compounding the situation in Fukushima, were part of the nationwide suicide tally of 27,283, down 2.1 percent, the fourth straight year of decline, according to the agency.

"The impact of the nuclear accident is prolonging people's stay in evacuated locations, and this could have affected" the Fukushima figure, an official at the Cabinet Office said.

Fukushima, which hosts the crippled nuclear power plant, saw the number increase by 10 to 23. Iwate marked four suicides, down four from a year earlier, while Miyagi had ten deaths, up seven.

A suicide's link to the disaster is determined by such factors as the existence of a suicide note and statements by kin, according to the police.

Bodies found at evacuation shelters and temporary housing and the deaths of residents at such facilities are counted as possible disaster-tied cases. Residents in disaster areas as well as people engaged in restoration work in such areas may also be included.

Of the 23 deaths in Fukushima, 16 people were among people who evacuated to other locations from their homes, up by five. This contrasts with four such people in Iwate, up by one. Miyagi recorded no suicides among those who relocated after the disaster.

Yasuyuki Shimizu, of the Life Link support center working to curb suicides, drew attention to the rise in Fukushima and called for increased measures.

"Many people may be feeling stressed for not knowing when they can go back to their homes, being unable to find transport or feeling isolated from people around them," he said.

Health was cited as a cause in 22 suicides, the most. Finance and daily life were associated with nine cases. Problems with work and family were mentioned in five each.

By age bracket, 12 suicides were of people in their 50s, the largest group, up by seven. Seven were in their 80s or older, up by four.

The nationwide sum stayed below 30,000 for the second year in a row at 27,283 suicides. Those attributed to finance and daily life issues dropped 11.2 percent. The Cabinet Office official said, "An economic recovery may have had an impact."

The welfare ministry also releases suicide data as part of population statistics pertaining to Japan. Figures may differ from the police agency's suicide data that also covers foreign nationals.

March 13, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Reviving struggling fisheries

March 14, 2014

Fisheries wiped out by 2011 tsunami seek ways to revive struggling industry

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201403140082

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

When the tsunami smashed the seafood processing factory where Shoichi Sato was working, he lost his job but eventually found a new life. Three years later, Sato is among the businessmen helping to bring back the fishing industry, long a mainstay livelihood for coastal towns along Japan's northeastern coast.

Sato's company, Kamaishi Hikari Foods, employs only 25 people but supports hundreds more who sell their catches of octopus, squid, salmon and mackerel for processing right at the water's edge. In Toni, whose entire port was wrecked by the tsunami, it's about the only game in town.

Businesses throughout Tohoku region face a reality TV show's worth of obstacles to setting up shop, from shortages of financing and construction workers and materials, to lengthy delays in administrative approvals and overburdened transport networks. For Sato, it was the Qatar Fund Foundation and other groups that pitched in with funds to buy equipment and advice on how to best run his new business.

Sitting in his second story office overlooking a wharf still being reconstructed, Sato said he got "zero" financial help from the government, which until recently wouldn't approve subsidies for new businesses.

Across the region, the government says nearly two-thirds of damaged land has been salvaged and 78 percent of fishery processing restarted. But for the majority, sales are well below pre-disaster levels. Most damaged stores and other businesses are operating from temporary quarters such as shipping containers and prefabricated huts.

The regional economy was in trouble even before the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered a nuclear disaster that contaminated chunks of the coast with radiation. The 18,520 people dead or missing as a result of the natural disasters were remembered this week as Japan marked the third anniversary of the tsunami.

Tens of thousands of people are in limbo following the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, unsure if they ever will be able to resume farming, fishing or other businesses, or even return home.

To the north, the seven biggest fish markets in Iwate and Miyagi, the two other prefectures that suffered massive damage from the tsunami, but not radiation, reported a combined catch of 303,629 tons in 2013, down from 444,894 tons in 2010, before the disaster but up from 169,786 in 2011.

It took the prefectural, or state, government over a year to approve Sato's tiny factory, which uses an innovative freezing process to package fish, seafood and seaweed for direct sales to a Tokyo supermarket and a sushi chain, his main customers. The process causes less damage to cells in the frozen food, improving quality when they are thawed for use in sushi and sashimi.

In the northeastern Tohoku region, young workers tend to leave to seek work in bigger cities. Fishing pays poorly, costs are rising and there are few other jobs. At the same time, the jobs that do exist go begging: Sato employs three generations of women from one family, from the 63-year-old grandmother to the 18-year-old granddaughter. Some of his employees travel from homes far up the coast to get to work.

As in much of the region, about half of Toni's 1,800 residents are still living in temporary, prefabricated huts. Fed up with delays in resettlement in new homes on higher ground, many residents are leaving.

"I need to be able to pay the fishermen more for their fish, or they won't manage to stay in business. That's apart from making any money here ourselves," said Sato.

Sato is keen to improve quality through innovations such as testing the salt content of his ice and water for optimal levels for freshness. He works with Japan Fisheries, the alliance of fishery cooperatives that oversees the industry, helped coordinate the transfer of seed oysters and seaweed beds to tsunami damaged areas, hurrying along the recovery process.

Still, nearly a quarter of fishing-related businesses have closed since the tsunami. In Miyagi, only 18 of the 142 ports wiped out in the disaster have reopened.

In the Miyagi port of Ogatsu, oyster farmer Hiromitsu Ito lost his home, his fishing boats, and his oyster beds, just after he had taken out a loan to begin oyster processing.

Like Sato, he restarted from scratch. But Ito is innovating with an online business model. His customers pay a membership fee and can buy a share of the catch directly from Ito's business.

Ito and his business partners used funds from the membership fees to help fishermen get back up and running. They are also training newcomers like 23-year-old Yuuki Miura, a fisherman apprentice, hoping to keep the industry alive.

"When I was small, I lived with my grandfather and I grew up watching him work," said Miura.

In a region whose population is fast declining and aging, time pressures are felt by all, said Ito, the oyster farmer.

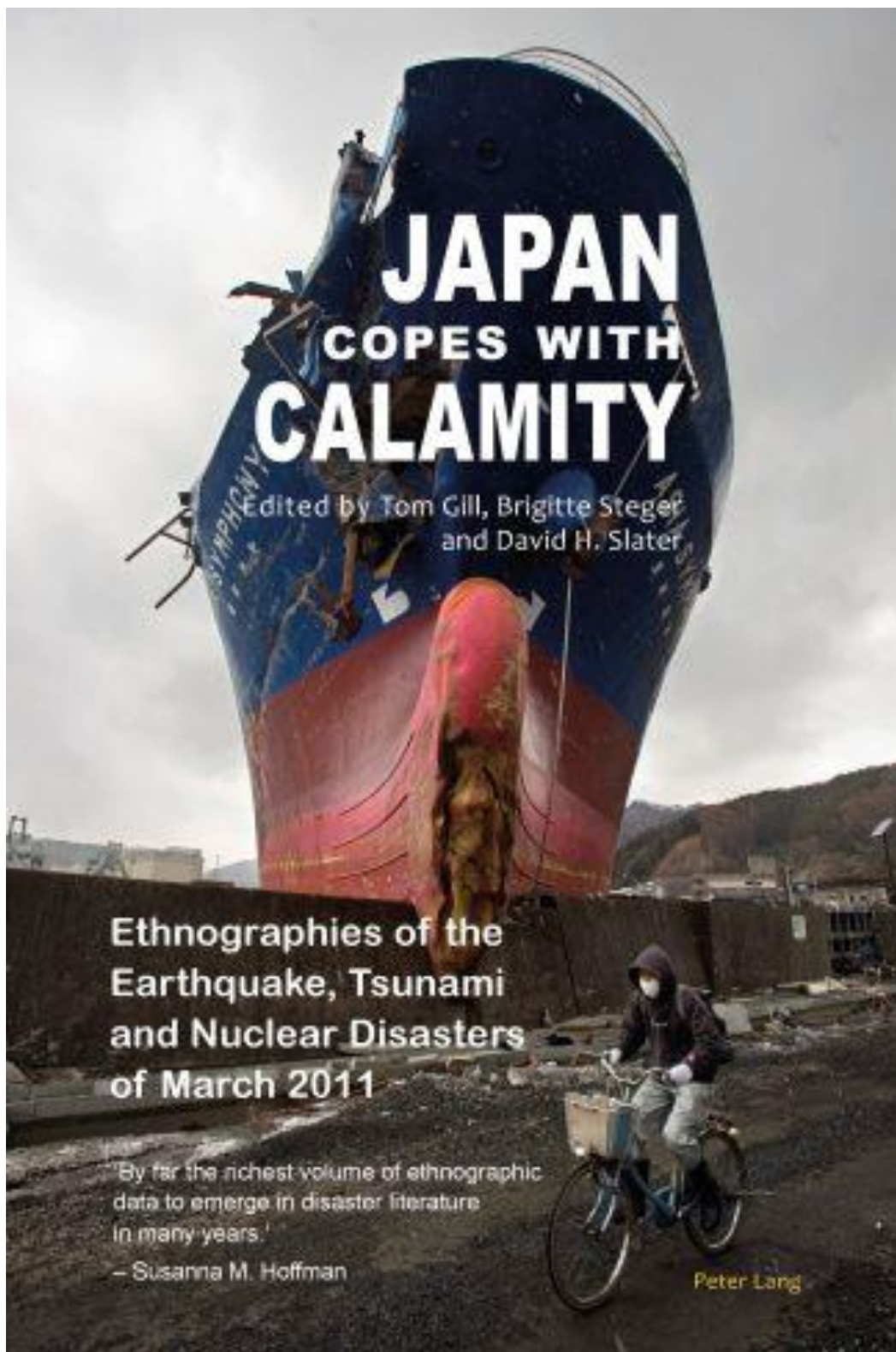
"This year is the real deal, it's the make-it-or break-it year," he said.

"Japan Copes with Calamity", by David Slater et al.

A few reviews of Slater's book

Book launch: Japan Copes with Calamity

<http://peterlangoxford.wordpress.com/2013/10/21/book-launch-japan-cope-with-calamity/comment-page-1/>



JAPAN COPE WITH CALAMITY

Edited by Tom Gill, Brigitte Steger
and David H. Slater

**Ethnographies of the
Earthquake, Tsunami
and Nuclear Disasters
of March 2011**

By far the richest volume of ethnographic
data to emerge in disaster literature
in many years.

– Susanna M. Hoffman

Peter Lang

[Japan Copes with Calamity, edited by Tom Gill, Brigitte Steger and David H. Slater, will be launched on Wednesday 20 November at 6:30 pm at the Japan Foundation, Russell Square House, 10-12 Russell Square, London WC1 5EH. Please book by emailing event@jpf.org.uk to reserve your place.]

The earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters that afflicted Japan on 11 March 2011, known as '3.11', were Japan's largest disaster since the Second World War, killing about 20,000. To this day, 350,000 people are unable to return to their home communities. *Japan Copes with Calamity* is an 'urgent ethnography' – a collection of studies by researchers who travelled to north-eastern Japan to study first-hand the conditions in the disaster zone, get to know some of the people dealing with the consequences, and make those people's voices heard.

In this special book launch, co-editor **Brigitte Steger** (University of Cambridge) will introduce the book and also talk about her own study from Yamada, a coastal town in Iwate prefecture. She spent several weeks living in a Buddhist temple used as a shelter, and describes the struggle of the evacuees to re-create their community and a sense of normality. Hygiene, both physical and spiritual, emerges as a key theme.

Alyne Delaney (Aalborg University, Denmark) will discuss the devastating impact of the tsunami on the coastal fishing communities of Miyagi Prefecture, based on her experience in Shichigahama, a fishing village that she knew intimately long before the disaster. She will focus on local and national government policies for post-disaster recovery, including funding challenges, forced relocation, and the responses of local people.

Tuukka Toivonen (Goldsmiths, University of London) will look at youth participation in volunteer activities and asks why they appear to have been so limited despite the enormous need for help after the 3.11 crisis and a vast amount of public sympathy for the victims. He exposes the socio-cultural obstacles to volunteerism, and describes how a spontaneously-formed group called 'Youth for 3.11' went about negotiating them.

Japan Copes with Calamity a new book by Peter Lang Press

<http://www.iasc-commons.org/blog/japan-copes-calamity-new-book-peter-lang-press>

Posted *November 1, 2013*

Japan Copes with Calamity: Ethnographies of the Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Disasters of 2011 is the new book published by Peter Lang Press and edited by Tom Gill (Professor of Social Anthropology, Meiji Gakuin University), Brigitte Steger (Senior Lecturer in Modern Japanese Studies, University of Cambridge) and David H. Slater (Associate Professor at Sophia University in Tokyo).

This is the first collection of ethnographies in English on the Japanese communities affected by the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of March, 2011 and the ensuing crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Interested Scholars, Students and Practitioners will find articles by Nathan J. Peterson, Johannes Wilhelm, Alyne Delaney, David McNeill and Ikeda Yoko, among other experienced researchers who explore the struggles faced by affected communities since the events of March 2011: from the sudden loss of life from the tsunami to the reconstruction of the fishing industry and campaigning to obtain compensations by the state and the nuclear industry.

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Amazon.com

Book Description

Publication Date: **October 17, 2013** | ISBN-10: **3034309228** | ISBN-13: **978-3034309226**

This book is the first collection of ethnographies in English on the Japanese communities affected by the giant Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011 and the ensuing crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. It brings together studies by experienced researchers of Japan from field sites around the disaster zone. The contributors present the survivors' struggles in their own words: from enduring life in shelters and temporary housing, through re-creating the fishing industry, to rebuilding life-ways and relationships bruised by bereavement. They contrast the sudden brutal loss of life from the tsunami with the protracted anxiety about exposure to radiation and study the battle to protect children, family and a way of life from the effects of destruction, displacement and discrimination. The local communities' encounters with volunteers and journalists who poured into Tohoku after the disaster and the campaign to win compensation from the state and nuclear industry are also explored. This volume offers insights into the social fabric of rural communities in north-eastern Japan and suggests how the human response to disaster may be improved in the future.

Not even enough food or fuel for more than a day

March 15, 2014

Disaster supplies on shaky ground

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/03/15/editorials/disaster-supplies-on-shaky-ground/#.UyW6YIXrV1s>

In the three years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, most of the country has yet to prepare itself for another disaster. A recent survey by Tohoku University's International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDS) found that a large percentage of municipalities across Japan still have not taken steps to ensure enough food or fuel to operate for more than a day in the event of another serious earthquake.

When the electricity supply was cut off after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, most municipal offices in the Tohoku region were caught unprepared. Local government employees had to run around to service stations in a desperate attempt to find enough fuel to power their emergency electric generation systems.

Few had more than a day's worth of food stockpiled. Prospects for the same thing happening again are high, according to the report, which stated that only 42 percent of municipalities nationwide maintained enough fuel to run emergency generators for three days. Without electricity, their ability to assist survivors and coordinate relief efforts will be highly impaired. Food stockpiles have also been ignored. The survey found that only 22 percent have enough food to feed staff for at least three days, while 46 percent have no stockpiles at all. Such lack of planning after the 2011 disaster is hard to believe.

Little progress has been made on reinforcing buildings, too. Even after the central government increased subsidies for renovations to boost quake resistance, only 38 percent of municipalities have subsidy programs.

Just close to 15 percent of local governments provide subsidies for renovation work, mainly because the sums can be extremely high, running to several hundred million yen per building.

Nor has there been much progress in other areas of prevention. Only the Yokohama municipal government began to subsidize purchases of seismic circuit breakers, which automatically cut off electricity during a strong quake and greatly reduce the danger of fires.

However, even in Yokohama, only three applications for subsidies were received.

Most municipalities seem to be in denial about the possibility of another earthquake. They should start to take responsibility for realistic preventive measures about food, fuel, buildings and fire. Local governments must take primary responsibility, but the central government needs to provide additional financial support and help make the subsidy programs more widely known.

Citizens — who themselves should be stockpiling food, water and other household emergency supplies as well — need to demand that their local governments do more to prepare for another earthquake.

The IRIDS report shows that not only has not enough been done since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami but also not enough was learned.

TEPCO promises full compensation

March 17, 2014

TEPCO to fully compensate Yamakiya residents

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140317_20.html

Three years after the disaster at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, many evacuees are negotiating with the plant's operator about compensation.

On Saturday, a group of evacuees from Kawamata Town won full compensation for their land and buildings after rejecting a smaller initial offer by the operator.

The government classifies the deserted areas around the Daiichi plant in 3 categories, according to levels of radiation. It designated areas in the Yamakita district of the town as 2nd and 3rd worst. Tokyo Electric Power Company subsequently offered less compensation to residents of the district.

39 households in Yamakita filed a request with a government-backed arbitrator, saying the utility should fully compensate them for their land and buildings despite the levels of radioactivity there.

They stressed that it is also unclear when the government will lift the evacuation order for their area.

The arbitrator proposed a settlement that calls on the utility to pay full compensation based on the value of the residents' assets before the 2011 accident.

The residents' lawyers say TEPCO has informed them that it will accept the proposal. This is the first time the utility has offered full compensation for less severe evacuation zones.

TEPCO will pay the residents a total of about 20 million dollars after the formal signing. The firm says it cannot comment on individual issues, but that it will address the compensation matter with sincerity.

Mar. 17, 2014 - Updated 06:17 UTC

Disabled making popular craft goods

March 21, 2014

Fukushima disabled are crafting hit products

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/21/national/fukushima-disabled-are-crafting-hit-products/#.Uy1G74XrXIU>

by Makoto Sekiya
Kyodo

People with disabilities living in Fukushima Prefecture are doing their best to promote the area by making craft goods that are proving popular both at home and overseas.

Before the 2011 disasters and subsequent nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, a number of disabled people would gather at community workshops that provided them with places and opportunities to work. They would produce skin toner made from luffa that they then sold. Orders dropped sharply after the nuclear disaster due to public fears about possible radioactive contamination of the luffa.

Left with nothing much to do except play games, they asked staff at the workshop in the city of Sukagawa for some gainful work. They said they “want to work, instead of playing games every day,” according to the staff.

As a result, the Sukagawa workshop and nine others in the city teamed up to create new jobs for the disabled.

Instead of skin toner, the people at the workshops started to craft handmade buttons for clothes.

After showcasing the products at a trade show in Osaka, the workshops received an order for 2,000 buttons from a local bag maker.

Tomoyuki Ikeda, president of bag maker Sunward Co., said he “felt something warm” when he saw the handmade buttons.

“I could see that disabled people (in the disaster areas) are doing their best,” he said.

Last November, Ikeda’s company launched a new brand featuring the buttons, hoping to support reconstruction efforts in Fukushima.

Under the new brand, dubbed “manga knapp” (“a lot of buttons” in Swedish), Sunward sells bags and purses with buttons made by hand at the workshops at prices ranging from ¥2,000 to almost ¥20,000.

When the company exhibited the products in a major department store in Osaka, it racked up sales of some ¥500,000 within a week. Sunward is now planning to sell them online, according to company officials.

A similar initiative underway in Koriyama, another city in Fukushima, was also prompted by voices of the disabled who wanted to stay connected to society through work.

About a dozen disabled people started to make bags with used A4-size envelopes at the Futaba Seisakusho workshop. Members of the workshop are evacuees from the town of Futaba, which is located close to the crippled Tepco nuclear power plant.

A customer in Hiroshima Prefecture wrote on her payment coupon that she intends to let many people know about Futaba through the use of the bag, according to workshop staff.

At Futaba Seisakusho, a 50-year-old man from the town of Futaba said he enjoys working with his colleagues.

“The work gives me a sense of fulfillment,” he said.

Kiyoharu Shiraishi, 63, head of an organization that supports the disabled in disaster-hit Fukushima, said working together can help them become more independent.

According to the Koriyama-based organization, a cumulative total of some 3,600 disabled people had been evacuated from the eight municipalities in the Futaba vicinity as of November 2012.

Many workshops in Fukushima are suffering from drops in revenue following the March 2011 disasters, officials of the organization said.

Looking to the future, Futaba Seisakusho is seeking professional advice on design and streamlining.

Last evacuation shelter

March 21, 2014

Last evacuation shelter cleaned

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/21/national/last-evacuation-shelter-cleaned/#.Uy1GaIXrXIU>

Kyodo

SAITAMA – About 250 evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture and volunteers cleaned up a high school gymnasium Friday in Kasu, Saitama Prefecture, that had served as the last evacuation shelter for people who fled in 2011 from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdown disaster.

During the peak in April 2011, about 1,423 evacuees from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, stayed in the gym at Kisai High School. The gym is slated to be closed because the high school has been merged with another school.

“We need to keep moving forward. We cannot forever maintain a sense of victimization,” said Mitsuo Horikawa, 57, who served as the community leader for evacuees at the gym.

Everything's fine...

March 23, 2014

Radiation-hit village may OK overnight stays

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/23/national/radiation-hit-village-may-ok-overnight-stays/#.Uy86GYXrXIW>

Kyodo

Residents of an evacuation zone within 20 km of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant may be allowed to stay at their homes overnight for three months starting April 26, government sources said Sunday.

At the end of December, 330 residents of 152 households in the village of Kawauchi in Fukushima Prefecture were still living in temporary housing since the power plant was tipped into meltdown by the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

They are currently allowed to visit their homes only in the daytime.

Decontamination work in the residential parts of the zone is almost complete, making overnight stays more feasible, the sources said.

The government will soon propose the plan to the village authorities and residents while looking at the possibility of lifting the evacuation order, although some remain concerned the radiation may still be high.

Meanwhile, the government has let residents in part of the city of Tamura, adjacent to Kawauchi, stay day and night since August 2013. On April 1, it will be the first area in the 20-km-radius hot zone to have its evacuation order lifted.

March 22, 2014

Fukushima villagers allowed to stay home overnight

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140323_03.html

Japanese government officials say they will allow evacuees from the area around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to stay at their homes overnight for 3 months starting in April.

The officials want to help evacuees prepare for returning home when they lift the evacuation order.

About 270 people from 130 households in Kawauchi Village are allowed to make overnight stays at their homes from April 26th.

Officials will brief them later this month to obtain their consent.

An evacuation order forced residents in about 40 percent of the village to leave their homes after the accident at the Fukushima plant 3 years ago.

They have been able to return to visit, but not stay overnight.

The central and municipal governments are considering whether to lift the evacuation order for that part of the village. They say radiation levels in the area are relatively low and decontamination work is already complete.

But many evacuees are skeptical. They point out that some spots still register high radiation readings. They also say they cannot lead a normal life with evacuation orders still in place for nearby areas where commercial facilities are located.

The evacuation order for a part of neighboring Tamura City will end on April 1st. It will be the first time officials have lifted an evacuation order since the accident.

Mar. 22, 2014 - Updated 19:51 UTC

Tomioka: Reconstruction plan

March 24, 2014

Reconstruction plan compiled for Fukushima town

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140324_22.html

A group of residents and experts has compiled a reconstruction plan for the town of Tomioka in Fukushima Prefecture. The town's approximate 14,000 residents have been evacuated since the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident.

The group presented the plan to Mayor Koichi Miyamoto at a temporary town hall in another city in the prefecture on Monday.

Under the plan, JR Tomioka Station will be the center of the new community. Radiation levels near the station are relatively low.

The plan urges town officials to rebuild houses and shops hit by the March 2011 tsunami so residents can return home in 2017 or after.

Town officials are seeking help from the prefecture to provide public housing for returnees.

The group points out the need to hold town-sponsored events for the evacuees dispersed around Japan to help them keep their community ties.

Mayor Miyamoto says work to remove radioactive materials from soil, building exteriors and elsewhere has just begun and reconstruction efforts are making little progress.

He also says town officials will work harder to rebuild their community.

The town is to draw up a second reconstruction plan in the next fiscal year that starts in April.
Mar. 24, 2014 - Updated 08:15 UTC

The old man of Iitate - A song by Zedvan

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFG9CxPXX_E

Since March 11, 2011, the destroyed nuclear power plant of Fukushima Daiichi vomits its radiation in the land of Japan and the Pacific Ocean.

The media talked about it a little, because it was the anniversary... Then, nothing more.

As a french singer, and citizen of the world, I can not accept the silence. Nor the irreparable losses that the nuclear industry inflicts and may even inflict on earth and humanity.

The day after the Japanese Government announced the evacuation of the village of Iitate (In the Province of Soma, in the district of Fukushima), Fumio Okubo, the oldest man in the village, aged 102, preferred to kill himself rather than leave his home.

Fukushima (The song of the elder of Iitate) attempts to give voice to this man.
Today I put online a video illustrating this song.

Two subtitled versions, one in english (http://youtu.be/lFG9CxPXX_E), one in japanese (<http://youtu.be/2pLs9BvTKMA>) are available.
Other translations will come soon : what Japan has lost, we have all lost.

Zedvan - "Fukushima, chanson du doyen d'Iitate" from the album 'La zébritude' (La Ronde Des Jurons / Absilone, October 2013)

<http://www.zedvan.com>

Evacuation order lifted

April 1, 2014

Evacuation order lifted for Fukushima district

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140401_81.html

The Japanese government lifted its evacuation order on Tuesday for part of a no-entry zone around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Government officials lifted the order for residents of part of the Miyakoji district of Tamura City.

It is the first time the order has been lifted since the accident at the nuclear plant in March 2011. The decision affects 355 residents in 116 households.

The government says relatively low radiation levels allowed workers to decontaminate the area before other parts of the no-entry zone. They completed the work last June.

Some residents have expressed concern that there may still be small areas of high radiation. The government plans to address their concerns by distributing personal dosimeters and arranging consultations with decontamination experts.

About 81,000 people have been forced to leave their homes in the no-entry zone around Fukushima Daiichi.

But a majority of evacuees from an area near the plant say they will stay away from their homes despite the lifting of the evacuation order.

Evacuee Hideyuki Tsuboi said his parents, in their 60s, will return home. But the 36-year-old and his wife plan to remain in temporary housing in the city with their 3 young daughters, and move to Fukushima City next year.

Tsuboi says he cannot choose to return unless living conditions in the district improve sufficiently from a parental viewpoint.

Mitsuru Tsuboi and his wife Mitsu, both 79, plan to leave the temporary housing to move back into their home in Miyakoji this month after some repair work is completed.

They visited their home in a truck carrying their belongings on Tuesday morning, and cleaned the kitchen.

Tsuboi said he was relieved to be able to return home. He said he wants to grow crops and live a self-sufficient life, but is concerned about the effects of radiation.

Apr. 1, 2014 - Updated 12:06 UTC



A farmer harvests rice on his farm in the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima prefecture, in October 2013 for the first time since the onset of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

Fukushima evacuation order lifted for the first time

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201404010052>

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture--The central government for the first time lifted an evacuation order around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, affecting 360 people, or 0.4 percent of the total population from the evacuation designation zones.

The measure, effective at midnight March 31, covers an eastern strip of Tamura's Miyakoji district, which falls within a 20-kilometer radius of the nuclear plant.

The official exclusion from the evacuation zone means residents are now free to live in their old homes in the Miyakoji area, but few of them are expected to return immediately to rebuild their communities. Many evacuees have become acclimated to their lives in evacuation shelters, and fears of radiation persist.

The government ordered all residents living within a 20-km radius of the Fukushima plant to evacuate on March 12, 2011, the day after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami set off a triple meltdown at the power plant.

The following month, the government added areas of high radiation levels outside the 20-km radius to the evacuation zone, which was expanded to straddle 11 municipalities.

About 80,000 residents remain evacuated from the designated zones.

Radioactive cleanup operations overseen by the central government were completed in June 2013 in the Miyakoji district. Afterward, residents from the area were allowed to stay in their homes for extended periods if they filed applications with the central government.

The government hopes to lift the evacuation order for a portion of the village of Kawauchi, home to 276 people, in late July. It is also considering lifting evacuation orders at early dates in the municipalities of Katsurao, Nahara, Iitate, Minami-Soma and Kawamata.

However, evacuation zone designations are not likely to be lifted any time soon in Okuma and Futaba, co-hosts of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and other municipalities that contain many areas of high radiation levels.

Gov't scales down evacuation zones around damaged nuclear plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140401p2g00m0dm037000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The government on Tuesday scaled down areas in Fukushima Prefecture subject to evacuation orders since the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

As of midnight, the government lifted its evacuation order for part of the Miyakoji district in the city of Tamura -- the first case of an evacuation order being lifted on an area within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant.

Radiation cleanup activities have been carried out to enable evacuees to return to their homes, but it remains to be seen how many of the 355 residents of 116 households in the area actually opt to move back amid concerns over whether the radiation level is low enough.

Besides Tamura, a total of 10 cities, towns and villages are still subject to evacuation orders. They are located either within a 20-km radius of the plant or in some areas beyond.

The areas have been classified into three categories based on their radiation levels -- a zone where evacuation orders are ready to be lifted, a zone where habitation is restricted and a zone where residents are unlikely to be allowed to return for a long time.

The Miyakoji district was designated as a no-go zone about a month after the nuclear crisis began, but it was categorized as an area ready to be freed from the evacuation order in April 2012.

Evacuees had been allowed to stay overnight at their homes since August last year, but registration was required.

April 01, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Evacuation order lifted, but majority to stay away

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140401_21.html

A majority of evacuees from an area near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant say they will stay away from their homes despite the lifting of an evacuation order.

The government on Tuesday allowed residents of part of the Miyakoji district in Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture, to return to their homes. Decontamination work has been completed there.

The order is the first to be lifted for one of the areas surrounding the plant since the nuclear crisis in March 2011.

The move covers 355 people in 116 households as of late March. NHK has found that more than half of them do not plan to return, while some expressed relief to be allowed back.

Evacuee Hideyuki Tsuboi said his parents, in their 60s, will return home. But the 36-year-old and his wife plan to remain in temporary housing in the city with their 3 young daughters, and move to Fukushima City next year.

Tsuboi says he cannot choose to return unless living conditions in the district improve sufficiently from a parental viewpoint.

Mitsuru Tsuboi and his wife Mitsu, both 79, plan to leave the temporary housing to live in their home in Miyakoji this month after repair work is done.

They visited their home in a truck carrying their belongings on Tuesday morning, and cleaned the kitchen.

Tsuboi said he was relieved to be able to return home. He said he wants to grow crops to live a self-sufficient life, but is concerned about effects of radiation.

Apr. 1, 2014 - Updated 06:38 UTC

March 31, 2014

Evacuation order lifted for Fukushima district

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140401_03.html

The Japanese government lifted the evacuation order on a part of no-entry zone around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Government officials on Tuesday lifted an evacuation order for residents of a part of the Miyakoji district of Tamura City.

It is the first time the order has been lifted since the accident at the nuclear plant in March 2011. The decision affects 355 residents of 116 households.

The government says relatively low radiation levels allowed workers to decontaminate the area before other parts of the no-entry zone. They completed the work last June.

Some residents have expressed concern that there may still be small areas of high radiation. The government plans to address their concerns by distributing personal dosimeters and arranging consultations with decontamination experts.

About 81,000 people have been forced to leave their homes in the no-entry zone around Fukushima Daiichi.

Mar. 31, 2014 - Updated 21:43 UTC

Can fishermen trust TEPCO?

April 2, 2014

Fishermen give Tepco green light

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/04/02/editorials/fishermen-give-tepco-green-light/#.Uzwi1Vfi91s>

A federation of fisheries cooperatives in Fukushima Prefecture on March 25 accepted the so-called underground bypass plan by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to release groundwater into the sea to prevent it from flowing into the basements of the reactor buildings of its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Two days later, a similar organization in Ibaraki Prefecture also accepted the plan, whose ultimate purpose is to reduce the amount of water radioactively contaminated by the plant.

The decisions were agonizing for the two fisheries organizations because the inflow into the sea of contaminated water from the plant has caused them tremendous economic harm. In addition to making serious efforts to halt the contamination of groundwater, Tepco and the government should adequately compensate local fishing cooperatives if they continue to suffer economic losses despite the bypass plan.

Every day about 400 tons of groundwater flows into the basement of the buildings housing Nos. 1 to 4 reactors, mixing with water from reactor cores and becoming highly radioactive. The underground bypass plan entails pumping 1,000 tons of groundwater directly into the sea on a daily basis to prevent it from flowing into the plant. This endeavor is expected to reduce the flow of groundwater into the basement of the reactor buildings by about 100 tons a day. The groundwater bypass was supposed to go into operation in 2012; Tepco now hopes to start operating it by the end of this month.

The fisheries organizations had little choice in their decision. If nothing is done, within a year there will be no more room to store contaminated water, which is now being held in huge tanks. If Tepco then decides to release the contaminated water into the sea, the Fukushima fishermen will be forced to give up trial fishing, thus further delaying the start of full-scale operations. As of the end of February, 1,095 tanks contained some 378,000 tons of highly radioactive water. Local fishermen harbor a strong distrust of Tepco because some 300 tons of contaminated water leaked from tanks in August and another 100 tons of water leaked in February.

The power company plans to purify all the contaminated water by March 2015 using the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), which can remove 62 kinds of radioactive substances from water. But the system is plagued by a number of troubles, dimming the prospects that it will go into full-scale operation. Even if ALPS becomes fully operational, it will be unable to remove radioactive tritium from the water.

Tepco also plans to start work in June to create a wall of frozen earth around the reactor buildings that will be 1.4 km long, 30 meters deep and 1 to 2 meters thick. It expects that this wall — to be completed in fiscal 2015 — and another plan to pump out groundwater will completely halt the flow of groundwater into the reactor buildings' basements. But some experts remain skeptical that it will work as intended.

At the very least, Tepco should comply with the demands of the Fukushima fisheries federation, which include strictly adhering to the standards set for radioactive substances in water released into the sea and confirmation of the water's safety by a third party. Tepco and the government should also remember that they have responsibility to the international community, too, and disclose all relevant information.

Two (different) articles on the same day - Same subject

April 1, 2014

Evacuation designation fully lifted for first time but radiation fears remain

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140401p2a00m0na009000c.html>

TAMURA, Fukushima -- The Miyakoji district of this Fukushima Prefecture city became the first area within a 20-kilometer radius of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to have an evacuation order completely lifted.

Now that the designation was lifted on April 1, local residents can live in their homes without any restrictions. Still, there are no prospects that residents will return home at an early date because their radiation fears persist.

However, the 100,000 yen in compensation that residents receive every month for their mental anguish from their forced evacuation is set to end in a year.

Following the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2011, the eastern part of the Miyakoji district, situated within 20 kilometers from the plant, was designated as a no-go zone. The designation forced 358 people in 117 households in the area to evacuate.

In April 2012, the designation was downgraded to a zone where preparations are supposed to be made to lift the evacuation order. In such a zone, where the yearly radiation exposure is 20 millisieverts or less, residents are banned in principle from staying overnight at their homes.

The national government completed decontamination work in the Miyakoji area in June last year, and local authorities started allowing residents to stay overnight in their homes in August on condition that they give notice in advance.

The central government decided in February this year to fully lift the evacuation order, and not decontaminate the whole area again in principle.

About 80,000 residents of areas designated as evacuation zones in 11 cities, towns and villages in the prefecture are currently taking shelter elsewhere. The government is set to lift evacuation orders in areas where decontamination work has been completed.

Some families who returned to Miyakoji, a mountainous area, before the evacuation order was fully lifted, were seen to dine at their homes, while others who have not returned are wondering whether the lifting of the order will lead to the recovery of their neighborhoods.

Kyoji Konnai, 55, a tatami mat shop owner, dined with his family members including his three elementary school-age grandchildren who live in the city of Fukushima.

"I feel more comfortable here than at temporary housing," said his wife, 52-year-old Fukiko.

The Konnais had traveled back and forth between their temporary housing unit and their own home in Miyakoji since August last year. Before the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, they had grown rice on their one-hectare rice paddy, but have no intention of doing so again.

"My relatives were glad whenever I gave them mountain trout I caught and mountain vegetables and mushrooms I picked," Konnai recalled. "But we want to have a barbecue party in a hut I built in my garden last autumn, and enjoy cherry blossoms."

Those hesitant to return home have mixed feelings about their neighborhoods.

Masahiro Ishijima, 56, was staying at an apartment in Tamura when the evacuation order was lifted. He met with about a dozen other residents of Miyakoji who are taking shelter on March 29. They talked mainly about whether to go home or not. He said only one household has decided to return home after the designation was lifted.

An Environment Ministry survey has shown that levels of radiation in his home's backyard were 0.9 microsieverts per hour, four times the maximum amount that local residents seek -- 0.23 microsieverts per hour, or 1 millisievert a year.

Ishijima laments that the results are always the same whenever measurements are made.

"Those who can't return to their neighborhoods have their own reasons," he said.

April 1, 2014

Some Fukushima residents returning home as gov't lifts evacuation order

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140401p2a00m0na012000c.html>

TAMURA, Fukushima -- Some residents of the Miyakoji district in this city began to return home more than three years after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, as the government lifted its evacuation order for the area on April 1.

On the morning of April 1, Kazuhiro Tsuboi, 66, who was a leader of the district, and his 65-year-old wife Sadako left their temporary housing unit in the center of the city where they had lived for nearly three years for their home in the Miyakoji district.

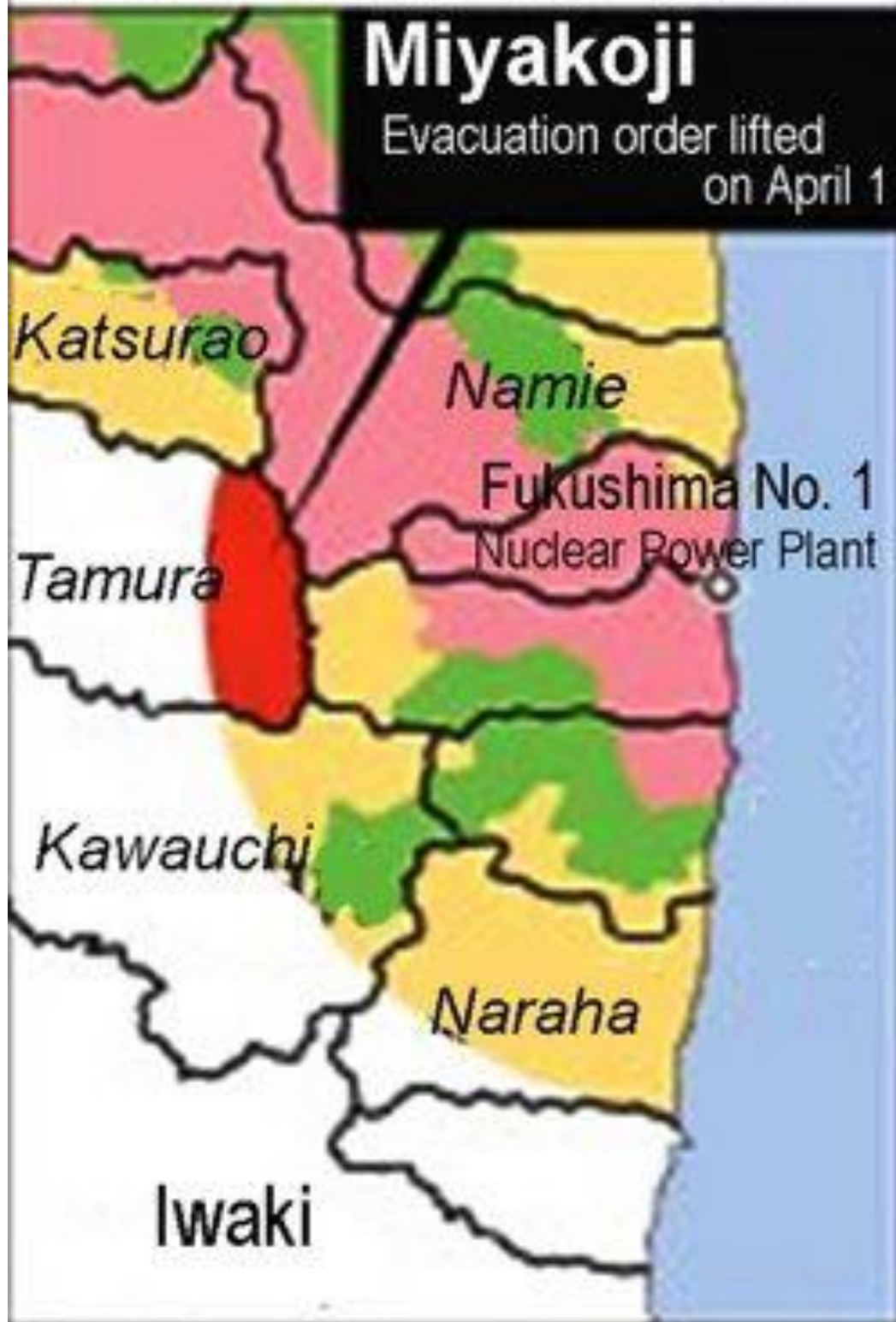
Temporary housing facilities in the city looked empty under the spring weather. After putting apparel boxes and a personal computer onto a light truck, Tsuboi left his temporary housing unit with no one seeing him off. "April 1 is the beginning. That's why we decided to move out of here," he said before he drove off.


Tsuboi remains outspoken about the situation. "Am I happy? There is nothing I am happy about. Nobody is excited about this," he said.


Evacuation zones

Miyakoji

Evacuation order lifted
on April 1



 Zones where preparations are being made to lift an evacuation order

 Zones where residency is restricted

(Mainichi)
拡大写真

Tsuboi realized first hand that the people of the Miyakoji district, who had been scattered in the mountains before the nuclear crisis, were in fact his nearest neighbors in the temporary housing complex. "Because we used to share things with one another and because there was a hospital and a supermarket nearby, it is natural that there are people who do not want to leave the temporary housing units," he said.

Nevertheless, he said no one could understand the "tightness" of life in the temporary housing complex unless they actually lived there. "After finishing watching TV, we put away our kotatsu electric heater to lay out futon (bedding) in a tiny room so that we all can sleep," said Tsuboi. He said he had long wanted to return to his big house surrounded by stone walls, albeit in an inconvenient location.

After driving for about 40 minutes, Tsuboi arrived at his spacious 165-square-meter home with a black-tile roof. He first opened a veranda-like porch and carried packages into his house. "At any rate, this is better than that (the temporary housing unit). That's partly because this is the place where I was born and raised," he said.

Tsuboi had firsthand knowledge of residents being split over the lifting of an evacuation order for the district. The most decisive factor behind the split is money being provided by the central government. Early returnees receive 900,000 yen each. "In our family, we have our son and his wife and three grandchildren. They will also return home. Everybody knows how much we can get," he said. The atmosphere in the temporary housing complex is that people are sensitive to each other's feelings. "Those who stood against the lifting of the evacuation order were told 'Do you want to get more money?'" he said. That's because if the lifting of the evacuation order is pushed back, they can receive 100,000 yen in damages per month. "We were divided by money. I would never be able to go back to where I was," he lamented.

Tsuboi is concerned about his neighbors and those people who have been his friends since childhood. "Tomohiro, Tadakatsu, Kyoichi," he recited the names of his neighbors while counting on his fingers. "Maybe, 12 households will come back by the end of April," he said. "I want to make this place full of life at least while having drinks at someone's house because there is no bar here and getting on with those who have returned is important. It is my mission to manage to put the district together. I am still a 'young man' here," he added.

April 01, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Once bitten

April 3, 2014

Survivors of 2011 disaster race to flee as tsunami arrives from Chile

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201404030057

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tsunami generated by the magnitude-8.2 earthquake that struck off the coast of northern Chile on April 1 took nearly a full day to cross the Pacific Ocean.

The arrival of the tidal waves was a painful reminder of the earthquake and tsunami disaster that ravaged the Tohoku region in March 2011.

Because of the time difference it was 3 a.m. on April 3 when the Japan Meteorological Agency issued tsunami advisories to Pacific coastal areas, stretching from Hokkaido in the north to Chiba Prefecture in the south, as well as to the island chains of Izu and Ogasawara.

But unlike three years ago, towering tsunami did not hit Japan this time. In Kuji, Iwate Prefecture, the waves reached 60 centimeters high just past 12:20 p.m. Elsewhere, the maximum tsunami height as of 12:45 p.m. was 30 cm in Oarai, Ibaraki Prefecture, and 20 cm both in Sendai and Hachijojima island south of Tokyo.

Agency officials said tide levels began to rise just before 7 a.m. along coastal areas in Hokkaido and the Tohoku region. Its advisories predicted a maximum tsunami height of 1 meter.

Evacuation advisories were issued to about 30,000 residents in coastal areas, including the municipalities of Rikuzentakata and Kamaishi, both in Iwate Prefecture, Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, and Mutsu, Aomori Prefecture. Residents took refuge in evacuation shelters.

No major damage was reported.

The residents had another good reason for exercising caution. A tsunami originating from Chile in May 1960 claimed 142 lives in Japan, mostly in the country's northeast.

Kaoru Oikawa, a 51-year-old part-time worker, said she took her son to an evacuation shelter in a hospital complex in downtown Kamaishi.

"I have to give my son the lesson that he should flee as soon as a tsunami advisory is issued," Oikawa said.

Fishermen assembled at the Momonoura fishing port in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, at 4:30 a.m. to move their fishing gear from areas near the wharves to higher ground. The fishermen maintain farming racks close to the port to raise oysters that are shipped from autumn.

"Our farm was finally getting back on track three years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami," said Katsuyuki Oyama, the 67-year-old head of an oyster farming company. "I am relieved to learn that there has likely been no major damage."

Minor tsunami hits Japan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140403_36.html

A tsunami generated by the magnitude 8.2 earthquake off Chile has arrived in Japan, with no serious damage reported so far.

The first tsunami waves reached Pacific coastal areas on Thursday morning.

60-centimeter waves were observed in the port of Kuji in Iwate Prefecture, northern Japan, shortly after midday.

Japan's Meteorological Agency issued a tsunami advisory for the country's Pacific coast at 3 AM on Thursday, about 18 hours after the quake. The advisory forecast waves up to a meter high.

The advisory covers coastal areas from Hokkaido down to Chiba Prefecture in eastern Japan, and the remote Izu and Ogasawara islands in the Pacific.

The agency is advising people in those areas to stay away from coasts and river mouths until the advisory is lifted.

Apr. 3, 2014 - Updated 08:05 UTC

Sanriku railway resumes services

April 5, 2014

Beloved Sanriku Railway making full comeback, despite fears for future

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201404050044>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAMAISHI, Iwate Prefecture--A local railway operator here that won the hearts and minds of the nation with its tireless efforts to rebound from the earthquake and tsunami disaster three years ago is set to resume full services on April 6.

The Sanriku Railway Co. has countless fans around the nation because of its one-car trains that many equate with the charms of rural life in an earlier age.

Most of its lines and stations in Iwate Prefecture, which is part of the Tohoku region, were wiped out in the tsunami generated by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.

While Sanriku Railway is viewed as a symbol of rebuilding efforts in northeastern Japan, the company faces an uphill battle to remain solvent following an exodus of local residents due to the catastrophe that claimed close to 16,000 lives and left nearly 3,000 missing in Tohoku.

At the same time, the railway company can count on a huge outpouring of support from rail buffs and people sympathetic to its plight. It was thrust into the national spotlight after the popular "Amachan" series aired by Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) featured a rail operator based on the company.

Operations of the 15-kilometer route between Kamaishi and Yoshihama stations on the 36.6-km South Rias Line coastal route resumed on April 5 for the first time since the disaster. The 10.5-km run between Tanohata and Omoto stations on the 71-km North Rias Line along the coast will resume on April 6.

Tsukasa Kawabata was among 30 or so local residents and tourists who boarded the first train departing from Kamaishi Station at 6:10 a.m. The 73-year-old had to move into temporary housing in Kamaishi after his home was swept away by the tsunami.

Kawabata decided to ride by train to see the rebuilding of local communities for himself.

“It is very nice that there is a train service since I cannot drive a car,” Kawabata said. “It is also uplifting.”

The single-car train reached Sakari Station at 7:04 a.m. after picking up passengers at Heita, Toni and Yoshihama stations--for the first time since the disaster disrupted services at those stations.

The reopening was eagerly awaited by other local residents, among them Chonoshin Sawada, 85, and his wife Tamako, 85, in Ofunato, also in the prefecture.

“It will be easier for us to go to a hospital in Kamaishi,” said Tamako. “We are very attached to the railway and will follow the company’s progress just as we did in the past.”

For 10 years up to 2010, the couple used to wake each day at 4 a.m. to sweep Horei Station at the South Rias Line at the request of officials of what was then the town of Sanriku.

The Sawadas like to believe their home was spared because of the Sanrikyu Railway.

With the approach of towering tsunami, the couple headed for higher ground and watched the waves pound the line’s embankment.

Three months after the disaster, the couple resumed their cleaning activities at Horei Station.

Junichi Konno, chief of the operation section at Sanriku Railway, said the company still faces an array of challenges even though the decision has been taken to return to full service.

Konno, 53, joined Sanriku Railway as the first batch of employees when the train operator was established in 1984 as a joint public-private venture.

Back then, the annual number of passengers exceeded 2 million, which was beyond its capacity at times. “Some high school students commuting to their school could not get aboard,” Konno recalled.

But the number of passengers shrank year after year in the face of depopulation stemming from the declining birthrate, as well as the spread of car use.

The company has operated in the red since fiscal 1994.

The earthquake and tsunami caused a terrible toll to the company's facilities. Damage was found at 317 sites, including bridges, train stations and track.

In fiscal 2013, only 500,000 people used the company's service, less than 60 percent of pre-disaster levels.

But that figure is higher than that of the previous year due to the airing of the NHK drama.

Rebuilding efforts stalled in many places across Iwate Prefecture, prompting an exodus of people. Another factor was that many residents made plans to move to higher ground out of concern over tsunamis in the future, which meant they are more likely to travel by car than train.

"It will be a challenge to keep offering the service, but we want to remain a company that is loved by local people," Konno said.

Even as far south as Tokyo, the famed railway company has its fans.

In the capital's posh Ginza district, Yoko Otani, proprietor of Otani, a restaurant serving Kyoto cuisine, pitched a Sanriku railway trip to guests while handing out brochures.

Otani, 61, started the effort after she learned that one of the regulars at her restaurant headed a group of people rooting for the embattled railway company.

Keiichi Enomoto, one of her repeat customers, said he plans to take a trip on the railway late this month with two friends.

"I want to see how much rebuilding was done in the Sanriku area," said Enomoto, 75.

About 8,000 people from around Japan took the train when the railway company offered runs under a program to get passengers to see how the rebuilding efforts had progressed in local areas.

Chiharu Arai, a Midorioka high school student from Ibaraki Prefecture who visited the Sanriku area in November on a school excursion, said she is determined to return to the stricken area in the future.

Arai, 17, said she felt a connection with the affected communities when she saw the devastation.

"I want to take a Sanriku railway trip several years from now to see how the local communities have been rebuilt," she said.

(This article was written by Tateki Iwai and Hiroaki Abe.)

TEPCO gets fishermen's consent

April 4, 2014

Fishermen accept groundwater dumping plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140404_31.html

Japan's government and Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, will likely start releasing underground water into the sea at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant as soon as May.

Fishery cooperatives in Fukushima Prefecture on Friday officially consented to a plan to pump up groundwater before it can be contaminated with radioactive materials at the plant, and release it into the sea.

The plan is considered key to tackling an increase in the volume of contaminated water that's hampering efforts to scrap the damaged plant.

The government and the firm promised to make sure that radiation levels in groundwater to be released will meet safety standards.

They say a third party will be involved in releasing the water and checking its safety.

The government and TEPCO say they will need about a month to brief local authorities and analyze groundwater before starting to release it.

The chief of the prefecture's fishery federation, Tetsu Nozaki, says fishery workers think they have no choice but to accept the plan. He calls on the government and TEPCO to strictly follow operational rules.

A radioactive wasteland

In Fukushima's wake: A radioactive wasteland

A series of 17 photographs

<http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/fukushima-60-minutes-nuclear-disaster/>

Three Years Later

Three years after the Fukushima disaster, many of the communities around the nuclear plant remain uninhabitable.

Fishermen demands to Gov't

April 7, 2014

Fishermen submit water-release demands

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140407_36.html

The head of a Japanese fishermen's federation has submitted the group's demands to the government regarding releasing underground water into the sea at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company have proposed a plan to pump up underground water before it flows into the nuclear facility and release it into the sea.

The measure is being studied as a way to reduce the amount of radioactive contaminated water building up at the plant.

Hiroshi Kishi, chairman of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, handed a written list of demands to Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Monday.

The federation calls on the government to have a third party monitor the release of the underground water into the sea.

It also demands that the government assume responsibility for possible damage from rumors about the fishing industry.

Motegi said he will do his best to meet the federation's demands, because he recognizes that the fishermen have made a difficult decision in accepting the plan.

A local federation of fishermen's cooperatives officially agreed to the plan last Friday. Workers are expected to start implementing the plan as early as May.

After his talks with Motegi, Kishi said he believes the government will keep its promise.

Apr. 7, 2014 - Updated 12:07 UTC

Swindling people who only wanted to help

April 7, 2014

Fraudsters took advantage of victims' goodwill to help Fukushima recovery efforts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140407p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Fraudsters who are suspected of swindling elderly people across the country out of hundreds of millions of yen in a bogus forest sales scheme in Fukushima Prefecture took advantage of the victims' goodwill to support disaster-recovery efforts as well as their fears.

Victims had previously been swindled out of millions of yen in fake sales and financial instrument investment schemes. Many of them were hesitant to invest in the forest sales scheme, but ended up losing massive amounts of money to fraudsters again.

What victims have told the Mainichi Shimbun over the case and the records of telephone conversations between them and fraudsters show that the culprits used crafty methods to cheat the victims.

A man suddenly would call a victim, offering to recover money they had previously lost to fraudsters and delete their name from lists of victims of fraud cases that had leaked to outsiders.

"Your name is on one of the lists of fraud victims that are being traded. We can delete your name from the list and recover the money you lost on your behalf," the man would typically say. "We're a third-party organization commissioned by police. We can't disclose the location of our office because we are dealing with crime organizations, but we're similar to a special investigation unit."

The man would then tell the victim that a man aged over 80, who is respected even by Chinese organized crime groups, served as an adviser to the police affiliate.

Shortly after the telephone call, the victim would receive another call from a different man with the caller's phone number kept anonymous. The caller would identify himself as the leader of Chinese crime organization and threatened to harm the victim or family members.

"The adviser called me and instructed me to return your money to you. I am holding your money," the caller said.

He would ask the victim how much bank deposits they had saying such information is necessary to "check data." When they refused to answer, the caller would say, "There're younger members who wouldn't hesitate to kill people, so we can kill your children. We've already checked your home."

The "adviser" would later call the victim claiming to have close relations with officials of the International Criminal Police Organization, lawyers and influential politicians.

"I scolded the crime organization boss and told him not to call you or visit your home. You don't have to worry anymore," he would say to the victim to calm them down.

Then, the "adviser" would warn the victim that taxation authorities could impose a massive amount of taxes on the repaid money

"If you are to get back a large amount of money as a lump-sum payment from a criminal organization, the taxation bureau would target you. The taxation bureau could strictly tax you unless you make some contributions to the nation," he would say. "The government intends to nationalize forests in Fukushima. If you buy a portion of them to support disaster recovery efforts, you can contribute to the nation. You can later get back the money you pay to buy the land."

He would then introduce a real estate agency to the victim and urge them to use the money they are supposed to get back to buy land.

An 82-year-old woman living in Tokyo, who had previously been swindled out of 14 million yen and was lured into buying land for 8.5 million yen, is furious about the incident.

"I thought it'd be all right to spend such a large amount of money if it contributed to Fukushima. It's unforgivable that they used disaster-hit areas for their crimes," she said.

A 77-year-old woman who remitted 2 million yen to buy land said she had imagined that soil contaminated with radiation generated by decontamination work would be temporarily stored in the forests, and agreed to pay the money to do something for Fukushima.

April 07, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Investors swindled over purchase of mountain forests in disaster-hit Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140407p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Fraudsters are suspected of swindling at least 70 people across the country out of some 400 million yen by urging them to buy mountain forests in disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture at prices more than 1,000 times their estimated value, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

Police departments that have been consulted by victims have launched investigations into the case on suspicion of fraud.

The Mainichi Shimbun contacted those who claimed to be defrauded, and confirmed that 37 of them have been cheated out of about 314 million yen. These victims, aged between 62 and 83, lost 1 million yen to 54 million yen each. They are also victims of earlier fraud cases.

The victims said they received a phone call from a man claiming to be a member of a public utility organization affiliated with police. The man offered to recover losses that the victims had suffered from past fraud cases and delete their names from lists of fraud victims that had leaked to outsiders.

A man identifying himself as the leader of a criminal organization called them and told them that he would reluctantly return the money they had paid to allegedly fraudulent schemes, as if to intimidate the victims.

A man claiming to be an adviser to the public utility organization subsequently called the victims and recommended that they use the money that would be returned to them to buy portions of a forest in Nihonmatsu or one in Kawamata, both in Fukushima Prefecture. The man claims that the central government intended to buy the forests and told the victims that purchases of such land would support disaster recovery.

Real estate agencies that they were introduced to by the public utility organization explained to them that the Nihonmatsu forest would be redeveloped into an airport for cargo flights while there was a plan to build a geothermal power station in the Kawamata forest.

They paid 100,000 yen per tsubo (a Japanese unit of land area; 1 tsubo is about 3.3 square meters) to buy a portion of land in Nihonmatsu, about 1,100 times the estimated price of the land based on which the fixed property tax on the property is calculated. The sales price is also estimated to be approximately 780 times the officially assessed land price, considering that land prices based on which the fixed property tax is calculated is 70 percent of the officially assessed land prices.

The forest in Kawamata is situated adjacent to an area designated as a zone for preparations to lift evacuation orders.

The victims were told that they would be informed of when the money they had lost to previous fraud cases would be returned after they bought the land, but they actually became unable to contact the organization and the adviser. Most of the real estate agencies can also no longer be contacted.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government and the municipal governments that host the forests said they have never heard of any plan to build an airport or a thermal power plant at the sites.

The former owners of the two forests told the Mainichi Shimbun that they sold the land plots because they became worthless following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. The former owners added those who bought their land did not say how they intended to use the land.

The 65-year-old head of one of the real estate agencies said he only lent his name to an acquaintance, adding that he knows nothing about the land transactions.

April 07, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Elementary school reopens in Miyakoji

April 7, 2014

Elementary school welcomes back students after lifting of evacuation order

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201404070059>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture--Days after an evacuation order was lifted for the first time around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, students attended the entrance ceremony of an elementary school that reopened here on April 7.

In the morning, new students enrolled at Furumichi Elementary School were welcomed by warm applause and many local residents, who were waiting near the school's front gate and holding a large banner reading, "Welcome back, Miyakoji."

The elementary school's students have studied at a temporary campus in the central part of the city of Tamura, since the nuclear crisis triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

But the central government on April 1 lifted the evacuation order for Tamura's Miyakoji district, which is located within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, and the Tamura city government decided to hold an entrance ceremony for the first time in four years at the school.

This fiscal year, the city reopened another elementary school and a junior high school in the district as well.

Of the 151 students at Furumichi Elementary School, 91 who are not living in their original homes are expected to commute to school from where they are currently residing via school buses.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi and Naoyuki Takahashi.)

April 7, 2014

Fukushima school reopens



http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140407_17.html

An elementary school has reopened in its original location near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. This comes after the government lifted its evacuation order for the area.

The school in the Miyakoji district of Tamura City held a ceremony on Monday to welcome new students.

Following the 2011 nuclear accident, the school had held classes in a temporary building about 20 kilometers away. But the government lifted its evacuation order for part of its school zone last Tuesday after the area was decontaminated.

During the ceremony, about 60 students, parents and local residents applauded when four 1st graders entered.

The school principal called on the new students to enjoy their school life. He advised their parents to consult teachers and school officials if they have any problems or concerns as their children grow up in the area.

School officials say the number of children enrolled at their school has dropped to two-thirds of the level before the nuclear accident. The school's return to its original location saw some students move to other schools near where they now live.

60 percent of the school's students will spend about an hour travelling to school by bus, as their families continue to live outside the Miyakoji district.

Apr. 7, 2014 - Updated 04:20 UTC

More schools reopened in Fukushima Pref.

April 7, 2014

Schools relocated from near Fukushima nuke plant reopen in Iwaki

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140407p2a00m0na005000c.html>

IWAKI, Fukushima -- Three schools and a kindergarten relocated from a town hosting the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant have reopened here for the first time since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

Eleven students and children attended the joint opening ceremony for the institutions -- one junior high school, two elementary schools and one kindergarten from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Futaba -- held in the prefectural city of Iwaki on April 7. Two other students are scheduled to begin attending the relocated schools in May.

All students and children -- two kindergartners, five elementary school students and six junior high students -- will study under one roof, inside a two-story bank building. Kindergarten and elementary school children will occupy the first floor, while junior high students will use the second floor.

Elementary school students will further be divided by partitions based on their grades -- two first-graders, one fifth-grader and two sixth-graders.

"I will study hard," said Sora Yokota, 6, a first-grade boy who is living in a temporary housing unit in Iwaki, after attending the enrollment ceremony on April 7.

A total of 26 teachers will educate the 13 children, providing meticulous support to them. The 13 are part of the 674 students and children evacuated from Futaba to elsewhere in the prefecture or outside the prefecture due to the nuclear disaster.

Not so obvious to return home

April 9, 2014

Many Fukushima evacuees reluctant to return home in former no-entry zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201404090045>

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

TAMURA, Fukushima Prefecture--One week after the central government lifted the evacuation order for an eastern strip of Tamura's Miyakoji district, few houses in the area were lit up at night as many residents are still uncertain if it is safe for them to return home.

Located near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the area was home to 117 households with 357 residents before the evacuation order was imposed in March 2011, following the accident triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Of the 117 households an Asahi Shimbun reporter visited between April 5 and April 8, 26 families directly confirmed that they have decided to return to their homes, following the lifting of the evacuation order on April 1. Two other families also have reportedly returned.

Most of the returning residents are elderly. Many of the original residents are still struggling with concerns over the stability of the situation at the nuclear plant, radiation fears and the inconvenience of living in an area that is lacking in many basic services.

“I don’t know whether I should return or not,” 71-year-old Yukiko Watanabe said on April 8, during her first visit to her home in the Miyakoji area, about 18 kilometers west of the Fukushima plant, since the evacuation order was lifted. “True, I feel at peace here, but I don’t feel like staying because I feel lonely and have anxiety.”

Part of a hill behind their home measures more than 1 millisievert per year of radiation. One millisievert or less is the government's long-term decontamination goal.

Undecided, Watanabe and her 79-year-old husband, Toshiyuki, returned to their temporary housing unit 20 kilometers away that evening.

Toshiyuki suffered a stroke nine years ago and continues to have mobility issues in the right side of his body. The couple said they can call for help quickly in the event of an emergency at their temporary housing unit. They are unsure if emergency assistance would be readily available in Miyakoji. And they are not sure how many of their neighbors will return to their homes.

The nearest supermarket is in Okuma, 15 minutes by car from their Miyakoji home, but it remains closed due to radiation concerns.

Before the onset of the nuclear disaster, the couple lived in their two-story house with their daughter, Masumi, her husband and one granddaughter and one great-granddaughter. However, after the plant accident, the older Watanabes were alone in their temporary housing unit as the rest of the family evacuated to prefecture-subsidized apartments in Koriyama, some 40 kilometers away.

The Watanabes' granddaughter, Konomi, said her 5-year-old girl has made new friends in Koriyama, and they do not expect to return to Miyakoji any time soon.

Masumi also does not plan to return. "We cannot return to the Miyakoji area," Masumi said. "There are few jobs available."

Evacuees currently receive compensation of 100,000 yen (\$973) a month from Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. But **the compensation will end within a year after the evacuation designation is lifted.**

Masumi and her husband are feeling pressured to find jobs as they can remain in their subsidized apartment only until March 31, 2015.

As an incentive to get evacuees to return to their homes, the central government has directed TEPCO to give each returnee a one-time payment of 900,000 yen.

But for Masumi, the money isn't everything.

"The lump-sum payment won't lead to future security," she said. "It would be much easier to find work in Koriyama, where there are many prospective employers and a Hello Work public employment security office."

After lifting the evacuation order in the Miyakoji area, no-entry zones remain in 10 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, with about 800,000 people still forced to remain evacuated from their homes.

The central government is planning to soon lift evacuation orders in restricted areas where decontamination work has been completed, including a portion of Kawauchi, with 134 households and 275 people, and Naraha, with 2,729 households and 7,510 people.

However, not all the evacuees are happy about it.

At a meeting with government officials in Kawauchi in late March, some residents voiced anxieties about radiation levels and criticized the government's move as "being too hasty."

"Do not control people's minds with money"

April 11, 2014

POINT OF VIEW/ KATSUNOBU SAKURAI: Residents need not be bound by money from central government

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201404110015>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Faced with harsh disruptions of their daily lives in the wake of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, residents of Fukushima Prefecture have often, and in large numbers, expressed their opposition to nuclear energy.

Despite that clear stand, the central government is pushing ahead with its plan to resume operations at nuclear power plants in other locations.

With that growing gap in consciousness between the central government and Fukushima, Katsunobu Sakurai, the mayor of Minami-Soma in the prefecture, was asked to present his views about the relationship between the public will and government policy.

In the January mayoral election, I won re-election after campaigning on a stance of moving away from nuclear energy. I received more votes than the combined total of the two candidates who took more cautious positions on a future not dependent on nuclear energy.

The southern part of the city lies about 10 kilometers north of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. About 40 percent of the city's land area is still designated as an evacuation zone.

With about 20,000 residents still living as evacuees, I believe the election result was a clear expression of the will of local residents.

A resuscitation of areas damaged by the nuclear accident and the rebuilding of lives of citizens in those areas are not as easy to achieve as central government officials believe.

It would be unacceptable to have the central government implement measures based on an awareness that did not take into consideration how difficult it is to resuscitate the feelings of people whose lives were utterly ruined by the nuclear reactors.

I believe that what was expressed through the election was the thinking of the people of Minami-Soma that could be summarized into, "We will carry out that resuscitation by ourselves. In order to do so, we do not need nuclear reactors."

EXPLANATIONS DIRECTLY BY MAYOR

Although three years have passed since the nuclear accident, the concerns and dissatisfaction held by the residents still are quite serious.

Among the younger generation, the greatest worry is about raising their children. Their concerns are not easily erased no matter how many times specialists explain the health effects of low dosages of radiation.

Among those in the prime of their working years, the primary concern is jobs. In particular, farmers are struggling because they cannot earn a living.

Senior citizens continue to hold out for wanting to return to their homes as soon as possible. For each sector, resolution of the various problems must be handled patiently, much like straightening out tangled thread.

While gaining the understanding of residents, we will do what we can as a local government without waiting to see what the central government does.

As in the case of the first decontamination work undertaken by city initiative that involved digging up one meter of dirt from schoolyards, we can always ask the central government later for the fiscal measures to pay for such projects.

If everything was done according to the authority and rules set by the central government, the entire process would be delayed.

What I have tried to keep in mind as mayor is to attend all discussions with residents beginning with the first visits to evacuation centers in Minami-Soma and elsewhere.

The greatest point of interest among residents is what the mayor is thinking about various issues. The mayor must go out to the people and explain the situation, especially during a time of emergency. It will not do to leave such matters up to local government workers.

Still, not everything has gone smoothly. In seeking an early return of evacuees, some parts of the evacuation zone within a 20-km radius of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were changed to zones being prepared for a lifting of the evacuation order (because annual radiation levels had fallen under 20 millisieverts). I was criticized by several hundreds of people who felt I had made the decision without consulting them.

While I gained understanding by explaining that restoration of the community was not possible unless people entered the zone, I later heard complaints from those who actually entered the zone. It is extremely difficult to listen to all of the dissatisfaction held by each and every person, including any complaints they may hold toward the central government.

STRONG DISSATISFACTION

Last year, incumbents in six municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, including Fukushima city and Iwaki, fell to defeat in mayoral elections. I knew all of them quite well. I do not believe any of them committed a major mistake because they all put their best efforts into the rebuilding effort.

The mayor of neighboring Soma won a fourth term late in 2013, but in a very close race.

I was very surprised at the result because at one time there was speculation that an election would not be needed because no other candidate would run.

He had even stronger ties with the central government than I do so the pace of rebuilding was fast, but the closeness of that race, along with the defeat of incumbents in other mayoral elections, demonstrated the degree of strong dissatisfaction held toward the current situation.

Despite that trend, the central government is still thinking about maintaining and resuming operations at nuclear plants.

I think that is wrong.

The nuclear accident should have been an excellent opportunity to change Japan's energy policy. I want those in the central government making policy decisions, be they Cabinet ministers or bureaucrats, to carefully observe the reality that is unfolding in Fukushima.

There are still many people in Fukushima Prefecture leading lives while being constantly concerned about data about airborne radiation levels.

Is it right for the central government to use subsidies and tax grants as a carrot offered to local governments in exchange for their going along with what the central government wants done?

Does the central government realize how that has interfered with local governments seeking to gain greater independence in the past?

I want to say to the central government, "Do not control people's minds with money."

Having won a second term by running on a platform of moving away from nuclear energy, I will push for the spread in the local community of renewable energy sources as I included in my campaign platform.

I supported and gave campaign speeches on behalf of Morihiro Hosokawa, the former prime minister who ran in the Tokyo gubernatorial election held in February, on the plank of immediately ending all nuclear plant operations.

While it was unfortunate that he lost, I want to cooperate with others who hold similar views in my role in a group of mayors who are seeking a shift away from nuclear energy and work actively within that group.

People tend to hold a greater interest in politics the more difficult circumstances they themselves face. To change the current situation will require political decisions.

With Fukushima now facing an unusual situation that comes around once in 1,000 years, politicians can attempt various measures to deal with the issues.

I believe it might be possible for the development of a "Fukushima democracy" with deep roots in the community facing the problems.

* * *

Born in 1956, Katsunobu Sakurai won his first term to the former Haramachi city assembly in 2003. After serving as a member of the Minami-Soma city assembly, he was elected mayor in 2010. After the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear accident, Sakurai was named by Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

(This article is based on an interview by Takafumi Yoshida.)

Salmon fry in Fukushima river again

April 15, 2014

Young salmon released into river in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140415_31.html

Fishermen in Fukushima Prefecture have released young salmon into a local river for the first time in 4 years.

The Kido River running through Naraha town yielded about 70,000 salmon annually before the accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011.

Fishing was suspended after the disaster because the area was designated an evacuation zone.

But tests last year and this year on salmon that had been released before the disaster found them free of radioactive material.

About 10 people from a local fishermen's cooperative released 10,000 salmon fry into the river on Tuesday.

The young fish -- each about 5 centimeters long -- were brought from nearby Iwaki city, because the local hatchery was destroyed in the 2011 earthquake.

Local fishermen plan to reopen the hatchery and release home-raised fry into the river in 2016.

They're hoping that a revival of salmon fishing will help reinvigorate their town.

Apr. 15, 2014 - Updated 08:38 UTC

TEPCO rejects settlement on compensation

April 16, 2014

TEPCO rejects settlement proposals over compensation to staff victims of nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140416p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) rejected some 20 proposals made by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center (ADR) to settle disputes with TEPCO employees and their families over compensation for damages stemming from the 2011 outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant, it has been learned.

TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear power complex, turned down six such proposals during a one-month period through March 26. All of the proposals were made at the request of TEPCO employees and their families, and there were two cases in March alone that were brought to court. Other TEPCO employees are also considering filing lawsuits against the utility. The unusual situation in Japan in which employees and their company confront each other is becoming increasingly serious.

According to people concerned, there were 21 cases as of March 26 in which procedures for ADR-brokered settlements broke down because TEPCO refused to reach out-of-court settlements. TEPCO rejected all of the compromise proposals made by the ADR to order the utility to pay compensation to TEPCO employees or their families. There were 15 cases that had been handled by the ADR for about two and a half years between August 2011 when the ADR was established and Feb. 25, 2014. That means, however, that TEPCO rejected six sets of compromise proposals during only one month thereafter.

A 45-year-old male employee filed a lawsuit with the Fukushima District Court on March 4 and a 23-year-old male employee filed a suit with the Tokyo District Court on March 10. The man who filed the suit with the Fukushima District Court was living alone in an apartment in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma near the troubled nuclear power station when the nuclear accident occurred. He is currently living in Fukushima city, and he filed the lawsuit demanding the utility pay about 7 million yen in damages including psychological distress. His lawyer Mitsugu Araki said, "There is no rational reason why only TEPCO employees should not be granted compensation."

The man who filed the suit with the Tokyo District Court is a young TEPCO employee who joined the utility four years ago. In the wake of the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, he slept in his car after evacuating from a company residence in Okuma near the crippled nuclear plant. He then moved to a corporate dormitory at the "J-Village" facility in Hirono and Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, in August 2011.

The man lived in a three-tatami-mat private room while trying not to make any noise. Thus, he had a series of sleepless nights. In October 2011, he lied down in the room but could not get to sleep. He later found out that he had taken one month's worth of sleep-inducing tablets by the following morning. Doctors diagnosed him with an adjustment disorder. He could not adapt to the environment and started to suffer from depression and insomnia. In the ADR-mediated procedures, TEPCO insisted, "His evacuation

finished when he moved to Iwaki city." Because of all this, the man moved ahead to file the lawsuit demanding TEPCO pay about 18 million yen in damages.

The man says that many young TEPCO employees have been leaving the company because of the utility's discriminatory handling of its employees. His friend who joined the utility the same year left the company, saying, "I can't work at a company that does not see a person as a human." The man asked himself, "Should I seek compensation even by suing the company?" After agonizing over the issue, he decided to file the lawsuit against TEPCO, saying, "For the sake of other employees who cannot raise their voices, I want the company to acknowledge its responsibility." His lawyer Motomitsu Nakagawa said, "TEPCO and the state should think about the fact that there are many employees in the background who cannot raise their voices."

According to other lawyers, there are at least two people who are preparing to file lawsuits against TEPCO. Although the situation represents a confrontation between labor and management, there are no signs that the Tokyo Electric Power Worker's Union will take any action. The union told the Mainichi Shimbun, "Because compensation is an issue to be handled by individuals, the union has no plans to negotiate with the company."

Protect cultural assets in Fukushima

April 17, 2014

Fukushima towns seek to protect historic sites ahead of hosting waste facilities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201404170071>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A sixth-century stone tower and a Shinto shrine are among local cultural assets the town of Okuma wants to protect ahead of a central government plan to construct temporary facilities to store radioactive waste in the vicinity.

A project got under way April 17 to evaluate the town's heritage that will enable its officials to urge the central government to protect historical sites when considering areas for the temporary storage sites.

The central government is proposing the construction of interim facilities to store radioactive waste from cleanup work at a site straddling Okuma and Futaba, which co-host the embattled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Education officials and local historians plan to examine each historical site to determine a priority of preservation.

“Having shared cultural heritage contributes to the strengthening of ties between local residents,” said Ryuhei Saeki, a member of the Okuma board of education. “We want to carry out an exhaustive investigation so we can preserve sites of great value.”

An official handling the proposed storage project with the Environment Ministry said that officials in Tokyo will give due consideration to sites of historical interest.

“If the towns decide to accept the construction of the facilities, we will consult with local officials over how to deal with cultural heritage sites,” the official said.

According to the central government’s blueprint, the planned site will occupy 16 square kilometers--11 square km in Okuma, or 15 percent of the town’s overall land area, and 5 square km in Futaba.

The Okuma education board said there are cultural properties in at least 50 locations in the town. Among them are a stone tower that is believed to have been built in the sixth century, an excavation site where pottery shards from the Jomon Pottery Culture (8000 B.C.-300 B.C.) have been discovered and an ancient tomb that has not been fully studied.

The officials and historians will examine the historical sites through late May. They will be required to wear protective gear due to high levels of radiation in the area.

Kiyoe Kamata, a 71-year-old historian from Okuma, said he is taking part in the on-site inspection to help preserve Miwatarijinja, a small Shinto shrine.

Kamata, who runs a pear farm, discovered the shrine hidden in a mountainous area of the town after a 25-year search. Even many locals in the community closest to the shrine were not aware of its existence.

“If we can maintain the shrine, the bond between locals may remain strong,” Kamata said.

The nuclear disaster unfolded after the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, about a week before residents were scheduled to have a sunset viewing event at the shrine, which had to be canceled.

All the residents in Okuma and Futaba were forced to evacuate after the onset of the nuclear accident. Although evacuation orders have been lifted in other areas, there is no realistic prospect for when all the evacuees of Okuma and Futaba can return home--if at all.

To keep alive the memory of their local cultural heritage, Kamata, who now lives as an evacuee in Sukagawa in the prefecture, published a book at his own expense and gave 500 copies to Okuma residents who scattered across the nation after the nuclear accident. With a flood of requests for copies, 300 more were printed.

Among Futaba's cultural assets on the proposed construction site is Koriyama Kaizuka, a shell mound from the early part of the Jomon Pottery Culture, which is among the oldest such sites discovered in the prefecture. The former site of an administrative office from the Nara Period (710-784) to the Heian Period (794-1185), known as Koriyama Goban Iseki, is also in the area.

The Futaba education board plans to investigate the two sites to study cultural activities related to fishing and details of the operation of the administrative office in ancient times. But Futaba education officials have yet to determine when to begin their on-site inspection.

According to the Fukushima prefectural board of education, many cultural heritage sites are also left unattended in other areas, not just Okuma and Futaba, where annual radiation doses are estimated to be in excess of 50 millisieverts.

The interim storage facilities will house soil and other waste from decontamination operations taking place in the prefecture for up to 30 years. The central government plans to permanently dispose of the waste outside the prefecture.

Although the Fukushima prefectural government as well as Okuma and Futaba town halls have yet to decide on the proposed facilities, the central government plans to start shipments of waste in January.

Cultural assets in Fukushima no-go zone surveyed

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140417_29.html

Officials of a town near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant have begun a survey to assess the damage the 2011 earthquake and tsunami caused to its cultural assets.

On Thursday, 3 town officials in protective suits began a survey on more than 100 objects designated as

cultural assets by the town, which hosts the disabled plant.

The assets have been left neglected after all residents followed instructions to evacuate the town after the nuclear accident.

In the Ottozawa district of the town, about 2 kilometers from the plant, the officials took photos of a milestone and sketched damaged main buildings and stone lanterns at an old shrine.

The municipal office plans to study ways to restore and protect the cultural assets based on findings from the survey.

One of the inspectors said that he was shocked to find the shrine's deity left toppled over.

The official said additional surveys are needed as quickly as possible to check the condition of other cultural assets.

Apr. 17, 2014 - Updated 09:26 UTC

Cherry blossoms in Fukushima

April 19, 2014



Cherry blossoms attract visitors to Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140419_13.html

Tourists are flocking to a town in Fukushima Prefecture to see a thousand-year-old cherry tree that is now in full bloom.

The tree, designated as a national natural treasure, is drawing people to Miharu town on Saturday.

The tree's sprawling branches are heavy with flowers with pink petals hanging in a cascade.

The cherry tree used to draw more than 300,000 tourists each year. But the number plunged to 150,000 just after the earthquake and tsunami 3 years ago.

Now tourists are gradually returning. Miharu town had 210,000 visitors in 2012, and 230,000 last year. The town expects more than 300,000 to turn out this year.

Apr. 19, 2014 - Updated 04:48 UTC

Fukushima evacuees allowed on the plant site

April 18, 2014

Fukushima evacuees inspect reactor scrapping work

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140418_36.html

Evacuees from areas around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident have inspected the plant for the first time since the accident.

The evacuees are members of an organization set up by the Fukushima prefectural government in order to hear a variety of opinions on the utility's work to decommission the plant. The group also includes members of restaurant and tourism organizations in the prefecture.

The 15 participants entered the plant by bus and saw the No.1 reactor building from inside the vehicle. The building was severely damaged in a hydrogen explosion and is now covered with polyester sheets.

They also saw from inside the bus the No.4 reactor building where operations are underway to remove nuclear fuel rods from the storage pool.

Their tour also included a visit to a facility where radioactive substances are filtered from contaminated water and wells where groundwater is pumped up to prevent it from mixing with contaminated water.

After the tour, they urged the plant operator to tighten up its management control, as human error keeps causing problems at the plant.

They asked the utility not to make evacuees uneasy while they are considering whether to return home.

Apr. 18, 2014 - Updated 12:17 UTC

Miyakoji residents feeling ignored

April 19, 2014

Rural community near Fukushima nuke plant left in lurch during local election

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140419p2a00m0na007000c.html>

TAMURA, Fukushima -- The nuclear disaster evacuation order in the Miyakoji district of this city was lifted on April 1, and district residents are wondering why recovery of their community has essentially been ignored by the candidates in an April 20 municipal assembly election.

The easternmost section of the Miyakoji district fell within the 20-kilometer radius exclusion zone around the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and it is now the first mandatory evacuation area where the evacuation order has been lifted. Most of the 357 people who lived there, however, have yet to return home, and residents who have watched the Tamura Municipal Assembly campaign move along with barely a mention of local recovery are worried about the very survival of their rural community.

One assembly candidate held a small rally in Miyakoji district -- inside the 20-kilometer zone -- on April 16. Among the 35 people on-hand was 49-year-old Masumi Watanabe, who has a home in the eastern part of the district but continues to live as an evacuee in neighboring Koriyama. Watanabe's family -- eight people spanning three generations -- is now spread out over four different locations. And even though the evacuation order barring the family from their home has been lifted, she says that they still can't come back.

"Even if I'm told that the well water has been tested (for radioactive contaminants) and that 'it's OK,' I don't know what's going to happen down the road. I also worry about how much decontamination work will actually get done," Watanabe told the Mainichi. "I want my city councillor to tell the city and the national government how we (eastern Miyakoji residents) feel," she continued. Despite this strong local desire for recognition of the district's plight, candidates' campaign cars were rarely seen in eastern Miyakoji.

The present-day city of Tamura was created in 2005 by an amalgam of five smaller municipalities, including the village of Miyakoji. The district has 2,372 eligible voters, or about 7 percent of the city's total -- the lowest of any of the former towns and villages that make up Tamura. Meanwhile, only two of the 21 candidates for Tamura's 20 assembly seats have built a support base in the district.

A split between residents has also complicated matters in Miyakoji and the city. There are other parts of Tamura where radiation levels are higher than in the district, but the people in those places are entitled to less compensation because they were not forced to evacuate. An assembly candidate drawing support from Tamura's other areas has been complaining mightily that the damage to their constituents from the

nuclear disaster "is being underestimated" by the authorities "just because we're 'further away from the plant.'"

In short, the apparently unfair treatment of Tamura's other communities in the wake of the meltdowns has made it hard for assembly candidates to talk about the plight of Miyakoji district, where evacuee compensation is available.

"The difference in compensation and other support has made relations among Tamura's residents pretty awkward," one candidate told the Mainichi.

April 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Hospital reopens in Minamisoma

April 23, 2014

Hospital reopens in Fukushima evacuation zone

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140423_27.html

More than 3 years after the nuclear accident in Fukushima, medical service has resumed in an area near the damaged nuclear plant where evacuees are allowed to make temporary visits to their homes.

The Odaka District of Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture, was designated as an evacuation zone after the nuclear accident in March 2011. Residents are now allowed to visit their homes during the day because decontamination efforts have led to a drop in radiation levels.

The Odaka Municipal Hospital reopened on Wednesday at a refurbished building previously used as a rehabilitation facility.

Outpatients can consult with doctors 3 days a week. No inpatients are accepted.

The city hopes the service will help more residents return to the town once the evacuation order is fully lifted.

The former head of the hospital, Doctor Tetsunosuke Takahashi, has returned as a part-time doctor. He says he was relieved to find his patients doing fine. He says he'll be happy if he can be of service to them.
Apr. 23, 2014 - Updated 08:09 UTC

Nahara: Go back or not go back?

April 22, 2014

Fukushima evacuees discuss whether to go back home

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140422_22.html

Residents of a town in Fukushima Prefecture who fled the accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011 are considering whether to go back home.

Officials of Naraha have begun hosting town meetings to discuss return, now that the government has finished removing radioactive material from living areas.

The first meeting was held on Monday in Iwaki city, where 80 percent of the town's residents have evacuated.

About 60 people took part in the event.

Officials explained that radiation in residential areas of Naraha has dropped by half from pre-decontamination levels. It's now at 0.44 microsieverts per hour, and a municipal panel of experts has judged the town livable.

They also reported that a makeshift shopping mall has been built in the town for returnees.

But many residents were wary. One person said it's too early to go back as radiation levels remain high in other parts of the town. Another asked the officials not to rush and to make careful decisions.

The town plans to hold meetings inside and outside Fukushima Prefecture through May 2nd.

Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said the town will listen carefully to what residents have to say, and make sure their lives can be rebuilt whether or not they decide to return.

Apr. 22, 2014 - Updated 06:32 UTC

Cherry blossom party in Miyakoji

April 26, 2014

Residents gather for cherry blossom party in area released from radiation evacuation order

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140426p2a00m0na013000c.html>

TAMURA, Fukushima -- Residents gathered here for a cherry blossom-viewing party on April 26 in the city's Miyakoji area, whose evacuation order was lifted on April 1.

The removal of the order was the first lifting among any of the evacuation orders placed on 11 Fukushima Prefecture municipalities after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster in 2011.

April 26 had comparatively low radiation readings, and around 30 residents from the Jikenjo area -- which is home to many residents who have returned post-disaster -- gathered for the cherry blossom event. One participant had come all the way from Chiba Prefecture to the gathering spot, whose Yoshino cherry trees were in full bloom.

Masami Konnai, 62, the vice-president of Jikenjo's neighborhood association who put together the event, said, "Not as many people have been coming back as I had expected (after the evacuation order was lifted), so I wanted to create a chance for locals to see each other again for the first time in a long while."

Evacuees' distress

April 29, 2014

Almost half of evacuated Fukushima households split up by disasters still divided: poll

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140429p2a00m0na009000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- A survey of Fukushima Prefecture households that remain evacuated in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear disaster has found nearly half of the households whose members lived together before the disasters are now split up.

In the prefectural government survey, released April 28, 67.5 percent of evacuated households have members who have complained about health problems since the disasters, indicating that prolonged evacuation has weighed heavily on evacuees.

It is the first comprehensive survey of Fukushima evacuees including those who voluntarily fled homes located in areas other than designated "evacuation zones."

The Fukushima Prefectural Government conducted the survey between Jan. 22 and Feb. 6. It sent questionnaires to 62,812 households by mail, and 20,680 of them, or 33 percent, replied.

The survey found that 48.9 percent of evacuated households whose members lived together before the disasters are still divided. Members of about one-third of these households (33.3 percent) were living apart in two separate locations. Another 12.1 percent were split up between three locations, 2.9 percent between four locations, and 0.6 percent between five locations or more. A total of 44.7 percent of the evacuated households have been taking shelter together in one location since the outbreak of the disasters.

The survey showed that members of 70.2 percent of the households from "evacuation zones" had complained about health problems following the disasters. The corresponding figure for those who evacuated voluntarily was 54.9 percent. Symptoms such as "worsening of chronic diseases," "insomnia," and "being less unable to enjoy life" were at least 10 percentage points higher among those from "evacuation zones" compared with people who evacuated of their own accord.

The survey also shows that 50.6 percent of the households that voluntarily evacuated have moved the residential registrations of all of their family members to new addresses. Meanwhile, 86 percent of the households who fled the evacuation zones have not changed their residential registrations.

A Fukushima Prefectural Government official commented, "As for those households that voluntarily evacuated, many of them have been moving their residential registrations to new addresses in order to receive administrative services smoothly. As for those from the evacuation zones, many of them are probably worried that they may not be able to receive compensation (if they change their residential registrations)."

When the households that had voluntarily evacuated were asked about where they would reside permanently in the future, 36.3 percent of them chose the answer "undecided." Altogether, 27 percent of them said they want to settle down where they have been taking shelter, surpassing the 17.1 percent of households that said they want to return to the municipalities where they had lived before evacuating.

Of the households that had voluntarily evacuated to locations within Fukushima Prefecture, 35.4 percent said they wanted to return to the municipalities where they lived before the disasters. The condition the biggest number of the households -- 35 percent -- set for returning to their municipalities where they had lived before evacuating was "the elimination of the effects of radiation and associated concerns."

In response to the survey results, the Fukushima Prefectural Government said it intended to speed up its program to build public housing for disaster victims and decontaminate areas affected by the nuclear disaster. The prefecture also intends to build infrastructure such as hubs for business establishments and medical services to resolve the problem of prolonged evacuation.

April 29, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Survey: Half of Fukushima evacuee households split up; distress rife in families

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201404290046>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Nearly half of households that evacuated following the Fukushima nuclear disaster have been split up while close to 70 percent have family members suffering from physical and mental distress, a survey showed.

The number of households forced to live apart exceeds the number that remain together, according the survey, the first by the Fukushima prefectural government that attempted to survey all households that evacuated.

The results were announced on April 28.

Between late January and early February, Fukushima Prefecture mailed the surveys to 62,812 households living within and outside the prefecture.

Of the 20,680 respondents, 16,965 households, or 82 percent, originally lived in the evacuation zone near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, while 3,683 households, or 18 percent, lived outside the zone but voluntarily evacuated after the nuclear accident unfolded in March 2011.

It was unclear if the remaining 32 households were originally within the evacuation zone.

Some 44.7 percent of the households still lived with all family members at their new homes. The figure included single-person households.

But 48.9 percent of households said their family members now live at two or more locations, including 15.6 percent whose family members are scattered at three or more locations, according to the survey.

The results showed that many households in municipalities near the nuclear plant originally contained many family members, but they were forced to give up living together as their lives in evacuation continued.

Families are often divided over the degree of fear about radiation contamination. Locations of workplaces and schools also split families, while many members end up living in separate temporary housing.

The prolonged life in evacuation, now in its fourth year, is taking a toll. The survey revealed that 67.5 percent of all households had family members showing symptoms of physical or psychological distress.

More than 50 percent said the cause of their ailments was that they “can no longer enjoy things as they did before” or they “have trouble sleeping.”

“Being constantly frustrated” and “tending to feel gloomy and depressed” followed, at over 40 percent.

More than one-third of respondents, or 34.8 percent, said their “chronic illness has worsened” since they entered their lives as evacuees.

Kawauchi residents allowed to stay overnight

April 27, 2014

Fukushima evacuation zone residents allowed to stay at homes overnight

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140427p2g00m0dm003000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Residents of an evacuation zone within 20 kilometers of the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant from Saturday are allowed to stay overnight as well at their homes following progress in radiation cleanup work.

Previously, the area's residents had been allowed to spend only the day inside the evacuation zone. The change means the residents will be free to spend the entire 24-hour day at home, for the next three months, after which the evacuation order may be lifted permanently.

However, because of the lingering fear of radiation, only 40 residents of 18 households applied to return home from evacuation housing, out of 276 residents of 134 households in the zone of Kawauchi village, Fukushima Prefecture.

The central government is in talks with the Kawauchi municipal authority and residents about lifting the evacuation order completely, given the progress in decontamination work.

If lifted, the zone in Kawauchi would become the second case of an evacuation order being lifted on an area within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant, following the Miyakoji district in the city of Tamura, also in Fukushima.

A total of 10 municipalities including Kawauchi village are still subject to evacuation orders around the plant devastated by a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Katsutoshi Kusano, 69, and his wife Shigeko, 68, said they have returned home in the village from a temporary housing in the city of Koriyama in Fukushima as they "remain attached to" their house and garden.

April 27, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Health problems affect 70% of evacuees

April 30, 2014

Fukushima evacuees complain of health problems

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140430_27.html

A survey by Fukushima Prefecture shows that nearly 70 percent of households that evacuated after the March 2011 disaster have members who complain of health problems.

The prefecture polled more than 62,800 evacuee households. About one-third responded.

Sixty-eight percent said one or more of their members complain of health problems such as lack of sleep or depression.

Prefectural officials say they understand the need to do more to help evacuees improve their health and living conditions.

Apr. 30, 2014 - Updated 07:51 UTC

Half evacuees families separated

MAY 4, 2014

Fukushima evacuation split 50% of families: survey

KYODO

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/04/national/fukushima-evacuation-split-50-of-families-survey/#.U2kn8Ffi91s>

FUKUSHIMA – Nearly half of the families that fled from Fukushima Prefecture when the nuclear crisis began three years ago have been separated by **housing problems, work requirements and children’s educational needs**, according to a recent survey of the prefecture.

Although municipal governments in the exclusion zone have undertaken similar studies in the past, this was the first to cover the whole prefecture, including those forced to evacuate and those who left of their own volition.

The prefectural government sent questionnaires to 62,812 families and received replies from 20,680. The results of the survey were released Monday.

Nearly 49 percent of the households that were intact before the accident are no longer under the same roof, the survey said.

Now residing in a “temporary” housing unit in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, Masaichi Koizumi, 78, used to live in the town of Okuma, which cohosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant, with five other family members.

Due to the small size of the facility, Koizumi’s eldest son lives in another home in Iwaki with his wife and their child.

Okuma’s approximately 10,000 residents have all been displaced. Koizumi has given up on returning to the town and is building a new house in Iwaki.

“I think I can finally regain the life I used to have,” he said, but added that he is “worried if I can blend into the new neighborhood because I don’t know anybody.”

In Tsuruoka, Yamagata Prefecture, a three-generation family of eight including a woman and her husband and their three children from an evacuation zone live are scattered across three separate units of apartment buildings rented by the city.

“I looked for a place where all of us can live together, but couldn’t find one,” the woman said.

Of around 132,500 evacuees, Yamagata has taken in around 5,000, forming the second-largest cluster after Tokyo.

Rika Takahashi, 41, voluntarily left the city of Fukushima for Yamagata, where she now lives with her second and third daughters. Her eldest daughter stayed with Takahashi’s husband in Fukushima but moved to Ibaraki Prefecture last month to go to a university there.

“From the beginning, families were often separated, but they are getting even more separated because of children’s education and other reasons,” said Yoko Tada, 32, a staff member of a Yamagata-based organization supporting evacuees.

According to the survey by Fukushima Prefecture, 67.5 percent of the households said they have family members complaining of “physical and psychological problems.” More than half of the cases consisted of sleeping difficulties and inability to enjoy things as much as before.

Of the residents who have expressed a desire to go back to their hometowns, 40.9 percent said they would go back if “their anxieties and the effects of radiation are reduced.”

But the nuclear plant still has a series of problems, including the leakage of highly contaminated water that is accumulating, while decontamination efforts by the central and local governments have been significantly delayed.

Over 3,000 evacuees have died from poor health

May 6, 2014

More than 3,000 evacuees die since 3/11 disaster



http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140506_19.html

An NHK survey has found that the number of evacuees who have died from poor health since the 2011 disaster has topped 3,000.

NHK asked local authorities about the deaths of evacuees as of the end of March. Most victims are believed to have died due to poor health brought on by the fatigue and stress of moving to temporary shelters.

The survey found that 3,076 people have died in 10 prefectures. The number rose by 388 from last year's figure.

More than a half of all the victims are from Fukushima Prefecture. The number of people who died from poor health was 88 more than those killed by the quake and tsunami.

Many of the Fukushima victims are from municipalities near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

May 6, 2014 - Updated 12:50 UTC

Banning products from Eastern Japan

May 8, 2014

Sake banned by Beijing after Fukushima accident popular souvenirs among Chinese tourists

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201405080004

By TAMIYUKI KIHRA/ Staff Writer

At the duty-free Akihabara shop at Narita Airport, Zhou Yueqiu carried a cart containing souvenirs from Japan, including items banned by Beijing because they came from a prefecture near the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Among the goods were four bottles of Urakasumi, a renowned sake brand brewed in Miyagi Prefecture, subject to the restrictions.

Zhou, 42, a company employee from Shanghai, said she was aware that the Japanese rice wine comes from the prohibited area, but came to the shop to buy some because she sipped the brand before and liked it.

"Nobody is bothered by whether they are produced in eastern Japan," she said on her way back to Shanghai last month. "The flavorful brand will be appreciated by anyone in China."

Miyagi, which is just north of Fukushima, is among the 10 prefectures in eastern Japan whose foods and feed products are not allowed to be imported into China due to a Chinese government ban.

The previous ban imposed in April 2011, following the Fukushima meltdowns triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, was targeted at 12 prefectures.

Sake is one of the food products that falls under the ban.

Japan's National Tax Agency's alcoholic beverage tax division said the purchase of the sake does not pose a problem for Chinese as long as it is for personal consumption.

Despite Beijing's restrictions, famed brands of sake made in eastern Japan are continuing to prove popular with Chinese visitors like Zhou.

At Narita, the Akihabara shop, which offers a wide range of souvenirs from all parts of Japan, draws about 600 Chinese tourists a day.

The area selling liquors takes up the coveted space of the shop, facing the walkway, offering more than 20 renowned varieties of sake from across Japan.

Signs in Chinese tout the features of each item, such as “high quality both in flavor and taste” and “soft and pleasant to the taste.”

The shop sells about 760 bottles of rice wine a month.

All the top five best-selling sake brands that Chinese tourists bought in fiscal 2012 were from breweries in the prefectures of Niigata, Saitama and Chiba--all covered under the ban by China, according to NAA Retailing Corp., which operates the Akihabara shop. The products include Kubota and Hakkaisan, both from Niigata Prefecture, a producer of top-quality brand rice.

In fiscal 2013, four of the top five brands were from the banned region.

“Chinese buy sake without caring much where the products were made,” said a NAA Retailing official.

Shuichi Mizuma, representative director of the Niigata Sake Brewers Association, said, “We hope that the Chinese government will review the ban as soon as possible.”

Buoyed by its healthy image, many Chinese favor Japanese cuisine despite strained bilateral ties due to a territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to war-linked Yasukuni Shrine.

The popularity of Japanese dishes gives a big boost to sake as a liquor, with a lower alcohol content, which pairs well with traditional Japanese dishes amid a growing health consciousness movement among well-to-do Chinese.

Bai Jiaming, a company employee from Tianjin, sampled some rice wine in a section set up for sake tasting at a duty-free shop at Haneda Airport on May 3.

“Japanese cuisine is popular in China,” said Bai, 41. “Sake tastes good, too.”

Asked about China's continued ban on imports of Japanese food products, Yang Yu, a spokesman of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo said late last month, "China is securing the safety (of food products) based on a scientific assessment."

Yang added that it is necessary for officials in Japan and China handling the issue to bolster their communication and exchanges.

Insufficient decontamination

May 8, 2014

Naraha Town Assembly demands more decontamination

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140508_35.html

A town assembly near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has called for more decontamination work before evacuees are allowed to return.

10 members from the town assembly including the chairman, Motoi Aoki, visited the Environment Ministry on Thursday. The delegation handed a written demand to Senior Vice Minister Shinji Inoue.

The demand urges the central government to reduce annual radiation exposure to below one millisievert before residents return home.

It says the government should be responsible for decontaminating and cleaning inside houses and buildings. It also calls for the thorough decontamination of the bottom of the town's Kido Dam.

Inoue reportedly told the delegation that the ministry will respond to the requests in a sincere manner with other relevant government offices.

Later, Chairman Aoki said the government's response will be a major factor in determining whether residents can return home. He urged the government to restore the local environment as soon as possible.

Most parts of Naraha Town were designated as an evacuation zone after the nuclear accident in March 2011. The area is currently designated as preparing for early resettlement. The central government finished decontaminating residential areas on schedule in March.

Naraha plans to decide the timing for the return of residents as early as later this month.

May 8, 2014 - Updated 16:45 UTC

Iwaki fish sold in Tokyo for the 1st time since March 2011

May 9, 2014

Fish from Iwaki sold at Tsukiji for first time since nuclear crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405090038>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Fishery products from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, were traded at Tokyo's bustling Tsukiji fish market for the first time on May 9 since the disaster began to unfurl at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

Of a total of 1.6 tons of flatfish, octopus and other seafood caught the previous day in trial trawling off the coast of Iwaki, 90 kilograms of pricey willowy flounder, 6 kg of greeneyes and another type of fish were traded at the market.

Before being put up for auction, the fishery products underwent voluntary checks for radioactivity levels by the Iwaki city fishery association and other parties. While 13 becquerels per kg were detected from the willowy flounder--well under the government standard of 100 becquerels per kg--readings for the greeneyes were below detectable levels.

Tohto Suisan Co., a wholesaler, said its willowy flounder from Iwaki was traded at around 1,000 yen (\$9.80) per kg on May 9, and all six cases, each containing 3 kg of the fish, were sold out. According to the company, trade prices were roughly the same levels as before the nuclear crisis.

"I am happy to see our fish sell quickly," said Norio Kojima, a Tohto Suisan department chief.

Post-traumatic disorder

May 10, 2014

Majority of Fukushima evacuees in Tokyo area may suffer from PTSD: survey

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/10/national/majority-of-fukushima-evacuees-in-tokyo-area-may-suffer-from-ptsd-survey/#.U24D01fi91s>

Kyodo

A survey of Fukushima Prefecture residents who evacuated to the Tokyo metropolitan area following the March 2011 nuclear disaster found that a majority of respondents may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Waseda University and an evacuee support group attempted to survey between March and April some 3,599 households that have taken shelter in Tokyo and neighboring Saitama Prefecture following the nuclear disaster, and obtained responses from 600.

Households were asked 22 questions to gauge their stress levels during a recent week close to the disaster's anniversary, with 57.7 percent of respondents found to have developed symptoms akin to PTSD, results released Friday showed.

More than half the respondents expressed concern about making a living or joblessness after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, according to the survey.

It also indicated a sharp decline in interactions with their current neighbors.

The support group, Shinsai Shien Network Saitama, said many evacuees felt a large gap existed between their current environment and their pre-evacuation one, where they often had interactions with others.

Given the high stress levels among Fukushima evacuees more than three years after the disasters, the group said the evacuees must be dealt with delicately.

The results of the survey, the third of its kind, are preliminary as they are based solely on responses from the head of each household, who responded to the questionnaire.

Abe promises to dispel "groundless rumors"

May 17, 2014

Abe vows to provide true Fukushima information

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140517_18.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pledged to provide accurate information to dispel what he calls "groundless rumors" about agricultural products from Fukushima Prefecture following the March 2011

nuclear disaster.

Abe spoke to reporters on Saturday after meeting a group of rice farmers in Fukushima. He has visited areas hit by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami almost every month since he took office in December 2012.

Abe operated a rice planting machine in a rice field in Matsukawa Town to plant young rice plants. He said the planting went well and that he hopes the rice will grow up to be delicious.

He told one of the farmers that the government will do everything possible to clear up groundless rumors about radiation in agricultural products from Fukushima.

He told reporters the rebuilding of the prefecture is his government's utmost priority. He said reconstruction has entered a new phase and steady progress has been made.

Earlier this week, the release of a manga comic book caused a stir when it depicted the health effects of the nuclear disaster. Its depiction of a main character suffering a nose bleed after visiting the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has been criticized as baseless.

Abe said he will do all he can to provide people in Fukushima and around the country easy-to-understand and accurate information about products from the prefecture.

No power saving targets this summer

May 16, 2014

Government asks utilities to secure excess supply

No electricity-saving targets this summer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/16/business/economy-business/no-electricity-saving-targets-this-summer/#.U3YFfCji-1s>

Kyodo

The government said Friday it won't set numerical power-saving targets this summer even though concerns about shortages linger, especially among suppliers in the west and southwest.

It is the second consecutive year that the government has refrained from imposing numerical targets to stave off the threat of the rolling blackouts that Japan was forced to resort to after the March 2011 core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, which hobbled the nation's largest utility and led to a nationwide nuclear freeze.

Instead, the government will take softer measures, including asking Kansai Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. to secure at least 240,000 kilowatts of additional supply capacity by the end of June. Suppliers have various ways to do this, including by increasing the number of contracts requiring reduced electricity usage during peak hours.

The government will also order utilities to do thorough checks on their thermal power plants and report their findings, to reduce the risk of any such plant developing a problem and shutting down unexpectedly. The plants are operating at full capacity.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry says the percentage of aging thermal power plants 40 years or older has doubled to 20 percent, compared with before the nuclear crisis. Unplanned shutdowns are also on the rise.

METI will call for voluntary power saving efforts nationwide from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays from July 1 to Sept. 30, excluding the national Bon holidays from Aug. 13 to 15.

METI chief Toshimitsu Motegi told a press conference that the government is not ruling out setting numerical power-saving targets or imposing other measures later in the season, but will consider them as needed.

The government estimates that Japan's nine regional power utilities will secure the minimum required power supply capacity when demand peaks in August, based on the assumption that all of the country's 48 nuclear reactors will remain offline.

But the situation will be tougher than last summer because two nuclear reactors were online at that time and shouldering some of the burden. The reactors, owned by Kansai Electric, have since been idled.

Japan has 10 regional utilities, but Okinawa Electric Power Co., servicing the southernmost island prefecture, is not subject to power-saving requests as it does not rely on nuclear power.

The government needs to assess the nation's likely power needs before the onset of summer, with heavy air conditioner use, and again before the arrival of winter.

Reactors that have met newly drafted safety requirements are expected to be allowed to resume operation at some point, but nuclear regulators have not yet completed safety checks on any nuclear plant.

European Kobe beef imports to start again

May 17, 2014

EU to begin imports of Kobe beef in June

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201405170039>

By SHINICHI MISHIMA/ Staff Writer

The European Union will allow imports of Japan's famed "wagyu" beef, including the hugely popular Kobe beef, in June, according to sources.

Wagyu is a type of beef that comes from any of the four specific strains of Japanese cattle acclaimed for their tender meat. Japan's health and farm ministries had been negotiating with the EU on exports of wagyu beef to Europe since 2005.

After approval of imports by the EU in February 2013, three meat packing plants located in Gunma and Kagoshima prefectures retrofitted their equipment to meet European safety standards. Having the revised equipment accepted by the EU, the first facility is expected to start exporting wagyu beef to Europe as early as June 9, the sources said.

The agreement will be made official by the end of this month, as long as there are no objections from Japan or Europe.

One of the types of wagyu beef to be exported is Kobe beef, considered a delicacy around the globe for its tenderness and fatty, marbled texture.

Because the beef only comes from a pure Tajima strain of wagyu cattle raised in Hyogo Prefecture that has met the criteria set by the Kobe Beef Marketing and Distribution Promotion Association, it was only exported for the first time in 2012 to Macao, Hong Kong and the United States. The limited population of the cattle was also a factor, with only about 4,000 or so processed in a year.

Distributors expect to export Kobe beef from 300 cattle annually to Europe after the processing plant in Kagoshima begins exports on June 24.

Although 100 grams of Kobe beef sirloin costs about 3,000 to 5,000 yen (\$29.55 to \$49.25) in Japan, the prices in the EU may rise above 10,000 yen due to the popularity of Japanese food, according to some European meat packers.

Q & As about evacuees lawsuits

May 19, 2014

News Navigator: What's the latest on Fukushima evacuees' lawsuits?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140519p2a00m0na002000c.html>

The Mainichi answers common questions readers may have about the spate of lawsuits filed by residents who have evacuated their hometowns due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

Question: I've heard that there's a rising number of lawsuits filed by evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Is that right?

Answer: Yes, a series of lawsuits have been filed with 17 district courts and their branches across the country. As of April, there were a total of 6,808 plaintiffs in those cases. Among them, about 2,700 are evacuees to outside Fukushima Prefecture.

According to the Zenkoku Kogai Bengodan Renraku Kaigi (National liaison council of defense counsels for pollution lawsuits), which is a group of lawyers involved in pollution and drug disaster lawsuits, the number of plaintiffs in the nuclear evacuees' lawsuits is the third highest in the country, following that in the Kadena Air Base noise damage suit at 22,058 and the Naval Air Facility Atsugi noise damage suit at 7,054.

Q: What's the contentious point in the evacuees' lawsuits?

A: At the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court, a group of lawyers representing Fukushima nuclear evacuees are calling on the court to conduct on-site verifications within the evacuation area because they want judges to have firsthand knowledge of the realities of the nuclear disaster. The Iwaki branch of the court, however, has withheld from giving an answer.

According to the liaison council, on-site verifications by courts at an early stage led plaintiffs to win lawsuits or compensation in not only the four major pollution cases including the Kumamoto Minamata disease case but also in the U.S. air base noise pollution cases.

"The court may be giving consideration to repercussions for trials filed at other district courts, but the nuclear disaster is the largest- and worst-ever pollution case," said Toshitaka Onodera, one of the defense lawyers for the Fukushima evacuees' lawsuit. "I hope the court will conduct on-site verifications at an early date."

Q: Is the number of plaintiffs in evacuees' lawsuits set to increase further?

A: Preparations are underway to file similar lawsuits in Ibaraki, Hiroshima, Fukuoka and other prefectures. At the moment, there are 133,000 Fukushima Prefecture residents who have evacuated their hometowns, of which 48,000 have evacuated outside the prefecture, so the number of plaintiffs is likely to increase. (Answers by Shinichi Kurita, Iwaki Bureau)

May 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

New documentary: "Three years after the nuclear disaster, nothing is solved"

May 18, 2014

Journalist makes documentary film after spending 2 years in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140518p2a00m0na005000c.html>

After over two years in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, and recording some 250 hours' worth of footage, a journalist is putting his work out in the form of a 3 hour and 45 minute documentary film.

A producer and editor for "The Will: If Only There Were no Nuclear Plant" praised the film as a "treasure-trove of imagery," so well does it capture the emotions of Fukushima residents and tense situations. In one such scene, the film's protagonist rushes to the home of a fellow dairy farmer who has committed suicide, a scene filmed after that farmer's obituary just happened to come to bear while the journalist who made the film was on-site.

That journalist was Naomi Toyoda, 57, who got his start as a freelance reporter back in 1982. A cram school teacher until then, he was spurred to act after seeing reports of Israel's invasion of Lebanon on television. He would spend 20 years reporting on Palestine, and 10 years covering Iraq's depleted uranium rounds.

"It's deep reporting, different than constantly dealing with the latest stories like in the mass media," says Toyoda. He runs his camera only after building a relationship of trust with his subjects, after they begin to show their natural selves.

Despite his time reporting from battlefields, Toyoda was still struck with doubt while working in Fukushima Prefecture. "I didn't know what I should do," he says, to help the residents there who have been forced to live their lives together with the threat of radiation.

The documentary film ends with the protagonist walking with a dosimeter around a temporary storage site for radioactive waste that resulted from decontamination work. Toyoda, in an expression of determination, says, "**Three years after the nuclear disaster, nothing is solved.** I'm going to keep on reporting."

May 18, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

"Loss of homeland" hard to measure

May 19, 2014

Gov't, TEPCO determined to fight 'loss of homeland' lawsuits

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140519p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUTABA, Fukushima -- Whether the national government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) can be held legally responsible for the "loss of one's homeland" is the principal focus of a series of class action suits filed by Fukushima nuclear plant disaster evacuees.

Beginning with a class-action damage suit filed with the Fukushima District Court's Iwaki branch in December 2012, 20 similar suits have been filed with 17 district courts and district court branches by a total of more than 6,800 plaintiffs. Takahisa Ogawa, 43, born and raised in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, is one of them.

Wanting to lead a life different from his grandfather and father, both of whom were teachers, Ogawa became a plasterer at a Tokyo construction company after graduating from college. When he was 32 years old, however, he left the company and moved back to Futaba to be close to his aging parents. That's when he realized that his hometown was blessed with riches from both the sea and the mountains. He decided to dedicate his life to work that would make good use of such wealth.

Ogawa learned beekeeping and fruit cultivation at the town agricultural union. At age 35, he spent around 10 million yen in savings and another 4 million yen in loans to buy approximately 1.6 hectares of deserted arable land. He then spent two years, starting in 2006, to clear the land of vegetation and built what became Ogawa Bee Farm.

The honey from Ogawa Bee Farm received an award from the prefectural beekeeping association, and found its way to department stores in Tokyo. To revitalize the local agricultural industry, which had been in decline due to the aging of farmers, Ogawa, along with other young farmers, began work to build a restaurant serving only locally-sourced produce and seafood. But before the restaurant could open in June 2011, the nuclear disaster broke out.

"I lost a precious fortune that I wanted to leave to my two sons (aged four and six)," Ogawa says. When he talks about fortune, however, he is not talking about money. Instead, he's talking about "the abundant nature and fruits of our homeland, the ties between people, the farm that we built as a family, and our pride for all of it."

During a short visit on May 2 this year to his farm in the mountains of Matsukura in Futaba, approximately 6 kilometers northwest of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, Ogawa found that the land he had once cleared had been overrun by weeds and other vegetation, and his beehives had decayed. "Must we still be at the mercy of the government and TEPCO?" he asked.

Five Futaba town residents have already died at the temporary housing facility in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama where Ogawa has evacuated. "There is so much sadness and suffering that only someone who has been driven from their homeland can understand," he says. "The current compensation system, in which the perpetrators of the damage assess the victims' needs, fails in trying to understand the suffering. That's why I decided to seek a court decision."

A major characteristic of the latest class action suit is that in addition to increased compensation for lost property, including housing, based on the possibility of a permanent move away from one's hometown, plaintiffs are asking for damages for the pain of "losing one's homeland." This is something that the lawsuits filed relatively early on in Fukushima, Tokyo, Chiba and Kanagawa prefectures, especially have in common.

Tsuguo Hirota, an attorney for Ogawa and others who filed suit with the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court, defines the loss of one's homeland as "the destruction of irreplaceable assets, such as nature and communities, as well as unique culture and traditions that people have created and built," and says it's the type of damage that heretofore had not been seen in pollution and pneumoconiosis lawsuits.

Meanwhile, the government and TEPCO deny any responsibility for negligence in the nuclear disaster. The defendants have expressed an intention to counter the "loss of homeland" argument in writing, but they have yet to state their reasons.

In response to the spread of evacuee lawsuits, the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation established a compensation package for the loss of homeland in December last year, indicating a turnaround in policy by permitting relocation as an option along with the return to one's hometown. However, only those who evacuated from so-called "difficult to return" zones are eligible. The plaintiffs' legal team, however, argues that such a policy ignores the fact that radiation levels in non-"difficult to return" zones has remained high because decontamination efforts have made insufficient headway, and criticizes the new compensation system as merely offering the 100,000 yen offered monthly under the current system as a lump sum.

Ryoichi Yoshimura, a Ritsumeikan University School of Law professor specializing in environmental law, attributes the spread of lawsuits to the inefficacy of government systems currently in place to provide relief to disaster victims. "In addition to the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation failing to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall damage, victims have been let down because the recommendations of the Center for Resolution of Nuclear Power Damage Claims lack binding power over TEPCO," he says.

Osaka City University environmental economist Masafumi Yokemoto, who has been carrying out interviews with evacuees and is sympathetic to those who have filed lawsuits, explains that evacuees say they want to return to their hometowns because their hometowns have characteristics that are unique and irreplaceable.

"Whether those elements comprise local communities, farmland, or workplaces varies from person to person. Land and homes are seen as assets that have been passed down the generations and should be protected. They're not something that can be measured in terms of economic value," he says.

May 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Defying authorities

May 28, 2014

NPO in charity drive to help defiant cattle ranch in Fukushima area

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405280044>



T-shirts sold by the charity Gift Hope will provide financial aid to Kibo no Bokujo Fukushima (Ranch of Hope Fukushima). The ranch is located in an area that was declared a no-entry zone by the government after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. (Provided by Gift Hope)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A Japanese nonprofit organization is using its design and Internet savvy to help raise funds for a ranch that is defying government instructions and raising cattle in a contaminated area near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Based in Sendai, the nonprofit Gift Hope picks one organization a month to help. The T-shirts it sells online during that time are designed by professionals as well as amateurs. Aside from getting funds, target organizations benefit through Internet exposure and name recognition.

The May campaign is for Kibo no Bokujo Fukushima (Ranch of Hope Fukushima), which is located in the town of Namie in Fukushima Prefecture. The ranch is in an area that was declared a no-entry zone after the March 2011 disaster. The central government also implemented a policy ordering the destruction of all cattle raised in the zone.

However, the ranch has refused to heed the order and continues to raise livestock so it can one day aid research into the effects of radiation exposure.

Gift Hope received around 150 designs for T-shirts over the Internet, 51 of which were selected for the charity sale. For each T-shirt sold, 30 percent of the proceeds goes to the ranch. The designer gets 10 percent.

The funds raised will help pay for the transportation costs of the feed needed to maintain the approximate 360 cattle on the ranch.

Osamu Fukushima, a graphic designer who heads Gift Hope's Tokyo office, said: "Wearing a designer T-shirt can serve as catalyst for talking about the organization being supported as friends may ask, 'What does that T-shirt represent?' In that sense, the T-shirt becomes a form of media."

Gift Hope kicked off its charity program this year as a way to use design to contribute to society. So far, it has supported one organization that provides support to disaster-stricken areas as well as one involved in landmine clearing.

About 200 designers have submitted entries so far. The T-shirts sell for 2,800 yen (\$27.50), excluding tax and shipping costs. Gift Hope is taking orders for Kibo no Bokujo Fukushima until May 31 through its website at .

Namie accepts arbitrator's proposal

May 26, 2014

Namie evacuees accept arbitration on compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140526_31.html

Officials from Namie Town, near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant, say the residents who evacuated from the town after the 2011 nuclear accident have voted to accept a government arbitrator's proposed increase in compensation.

Namie's 15,000 residents all moved away from the town due to high levels of radiation.

Officials filed a petition last year to the Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims, hoping to increase a monthly payment for mental suffering from 1,000 dollars to 3,500 dollars per person.

The arbitrator recommended a smaller raise, to 1,500 dollars per month. Namie officials said on Monday

that 98 percent of the evacuees have agreed to accept this figure.

The increase will apply retroactively for the 2-year period until this February.

Executives at the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, have yet to accept the proposal. They say they need time to consider it carefully.

The utility has until Wednesday to respond to the arbitrator.

May 26, 2014 - Updated 10:47 UTC

TEPCO ordered by court to pay compensation

May 26, 2014

Court tells TEPCO to pay evacuee's living expense

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140526_28.html

A court has ordered Tokyo Electric Power Company to cover the living expenses for a man who evacuated after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The Kyoto District Court issued the ruling last Tuesday and told the utility to pay 400-thousand yen, or about 4,000 dollars, a month for one year from May.

The man in his 40s is seeking compensation of 1.3 million dollars, arguing that he has been unable to work since the nuclear accident due to post-traumatic stress disorder.

He evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture to Kyoto City on a voluntary basis.

He filed for a court injunction last December to require TEPCO to make monthly payments of 6,000 dollars. He said he cannot maintain his life without temporary financial support.

The man's lawyer and TEPCO say the utility has paid compensation to evacuees as part of its legal settlements. But this is the first time a court has ordered the utility to cover living expenses.

The lawyer, Kenichi Ido, says the ruling paves the way for financially struggling evacuees to continue pursuing lawsuits against TEPCO while securing funds to live on.

A TEPCO official declined to comment on the ruling.

May 26, 2014 - Updated 08:55 UTC

Decontamination & poetry

May 28, 2014

Decontamination worker moved by what he saw writes poetry in Fukushima

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201405280003

By KENTARO ISOMURA/ Staff Writer

Retired letter carrier Minoru Ikeda had never written a "tanka" poem in his life, but working to decontaminate areas in Fukushima Prefecture and seeing the reality of the daunting task suddenly inspired him to become a poet.

"Words (for poems) came into (my head)," Ikeda, 61, recalled.

When turning 60 last year, Ikeda retired from his mail carrier's job in Tokyo. He started doing decontamination work for a contractor in Namie, located north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, raking and collecting mowed grass on riverbanks.

Ikeda sent his newly composed poems to The Asahi Shimbun's "Kadan" poetry page. Four of his works were chosen and carried on the page this month--two in the May 19 issue and the other two in the May 26 edition.

One of the two in the May 19 edition read, "Josensuru kumade no ueni furu kaben/ Mederarezu chiru Namie no sakura" (Flower petals fall on a bamboo rake that is engaged in decontamination/ Cherry blossoms in Namie fall without being loved).

Another in the same issue read, "Dorekurai josen sureba hito wa kaerudaro/ Jimon wo mune ni karu Namie no soka" (How much decontamination work will be necessary to make it possible for people to return/ Keeping the question in my mind, I mow the grass and flowers in Namie).

Ikeda said he was inspired to write the poems in mid-April, when cherry blossoms were in full bloom. Seeing them, one of his colleagues, who usually didn't speak, remarked, "How beautiful they are!"

However, at the same time, Ikeda saw no one at the nearby Namie High School, because the town had been evacuated following the outbreak of the crisis at the nuclear plant. Feeling pity for those cherry blossoms that would not be enjoyed by local residents and developing a feeling of emptiness, Ikeda started working on the two poems.

He composed them during break times and input them into his smartphone. After returning at night to a prefabricated housing facility for decontamination workers in Minami-Soma, next to Namie, he completed them.

After the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the grim situation in Fukushima Prefecture due to the nuclear plant accident remained in his mind. After reaching the mandatory retirement age at his job in Tokyo, he went to a government-run Hello Work job placement center.

In the facility, he told its staff that he wanted work directly related to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant because he wanted to contribute to the reconstruction of the areas affected by the nuclear accident.

“The issue of nuclear power generation is a focus of today’s Japan. That’s why I thought that I wanted to do something related to the issue,” Ikeda said.

However, his skills were not suited for jobs inside the plant. Therefore, he chose to help with the decontamination efforts around the plant.

In February this year, Ikeda began to work for the second-layer subcontractor of a company that won a contract for decontamination work. His colleagues included workers who came long distances from prefectures such as Aomori and Okinawa.

His job should have continued through the summer of 2015. However, it was suddenly terminated at the end of June due to the change of circumstances surrounding his company.

“We are disposable (workers),” he thought at the time.

The discouragement led him to compose the following poem:

“Ichiji niji josen shitauke wa koma no goto/ Koki ni oware owareba taiki” (Workers of first-layer and second-layer subcontractors for decontamination work are like pieces in a board game/ They are busily completing their work within designated periods, and, after the periods end, they have to stand by for the next work to come their way).

Ikeda visited a bar in Minami-Soma and told its owner, whom he had become acquainted with, "I will return to Tokyo." The bar owner asked him, "Please come here again." Ikeda felt that he was being asked not to abandon Fukushima.

Ikeda, who is now in Tokyo, plans to return to Fukushima.

Nahara evacuation order to be lifted soon

May 30, 2014

State to lift evacuation order for Fukushima town next spring

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405300028>



A train takes a test run on the JR Joban Line in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, on May 29. Bags containing radioactive soil can be seen along the railway. (Yosuke Fukudome)

By HIROKI ITO/ Staff Writer

The government plans to lift the mandatory evacuation order for Naraha, allowing residents to return to the town hit hard by the Fukushima nuclear disaster as early as spring 2015, the Naraha mayor said.

“The minimum required conditions (for returning) are being met,” Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said at a news conference in Fukushima Prefecture on May 29.

Almost all of the town was designated a mandatory evacuation zone after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

In March, Naraha completed decontamination work in its residential areas. The town now has a population of 7,500.

Residents and administrative offices were forced to evacuate from seven towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture following the disaster. The mayor’s announcement is the first time a return date has been given for these areas.

Matsumoto said the Naraha town government is considering permitting short stays by the end of the fiscal year for evacuees who hope to return home after the evacuation order is lifted.

However, some residents and town assembly members are cautious about returning at the earliest possible dates.

Radiation levels remain high in some areas of the town, and houses and other buildings are still in ruins.

Moreover, those who return will no longer be eligible for consolation money from Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima nuclear plant, one year after the evacuation order is lifted.

Matsumoto said the municipality will postpone the return if the needed conditions are not met.

The Abe Cabinet finalized reconstruction acceleration guidelines for Fukushima Prefecture late last year that promise to provide additional compensation for evacuees who return to their homes within a year of lifting evacuation orders.

Another food ban lifted

May 31, 2014

Singapore lifts ban on food imports from Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140531p2g00m0dm041000c.html>

SINGAPORE (Kyodo) -- Singapore has decided to lift a ban on food imports from Japan's Fukushima Prefecture, which hosts the crisis-hit nuclear plant, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Saturday at a meeting with his visiting Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe.

In response, Abe expressed his gratitude to Lee and said, "It gives Fukushima great courage," Japanese government officials said.

Singapore stopped importing Fukushima-made food products after the massive earthquake and tsunami of March 2011 triggered one of the world's worst nuclear disasters at the Fukushima Daiichi complex in northeastern Japan.

Abe and Lee, meeting on the sidelines of an Asia security conference in the city state, agreed on the need to resolve international disputes peacefully amid China's territorial claims against neighboring countries in the South China Sea.

The two prime ministers also confirmed a plan to revise a bilateral economic partnership agreement that took effect in 2002 with the aim of further promoting trade and investment between the two nations.

Abe announced the EPA review plan at a joint press conference with Lee, following their summit talks.

Japan and Singapore have strong economic ties. Singapore was the first country with which Japan put into force a bilateral free trade agreement.

May 31, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Trains back

June 1, 2014

Rail services resumes in Fukushima after 3 years

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140602_01.html

In Fukushima Prefecture, railway services have resumed in areas designated as evacuation zones after the 2011 nuclear accident.

The first train run since in about three years was on Sunday between Hirono and Tatsuta stations in Naraha Town on the JR Joban Line.

Railway services for the 8.5-kilometer section were suspended after the accident. Most areas along the section are still designated as evacuation zones, and only daytime entry to these areas is permitted.

But, East Japan Railway decided on the resumption after confirming that radiation levels in the areas no longer pose safety problems as a result of decontamination works on the rail lines, as well as inside and outside of the stations.

On Sunday morning, the first train carrying residents and Naraha Town officials left Iwaki City, where they currently reside.

About 25 minutes after departure, passengers cheered as the train entered areas where train services had been suspended.

The town announced last Thursday that its goal is to allow people to return to their homes some time after next spring. Officials hope the resumption of train services will help speed up reconstruction of the areas.

Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto said he was happy to see people smiling when the train entered the town.

He said the town still has temporary storage for radiation waste, but he hopes the resumption of railway services will help the town's reconstruction. JR East says the train makes 9 round trips each day.

Jun. 1, 2014 - Updated 15:10 UTC

Compensation swindlers arrested

June 2, 2014

Police arrest men for Fukushima redress fraud

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140602_14.html

Tokyo police have arrested 2 men on suspicion of swindling compensation funds intended for people affected by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

Police say the men defrauded Tokyo Electric Power Company of 40,000 dollars in the year after the accident.

The suspects allegedly made a false claim that their staffing agency suffered a sales drop because it received fewer job orders from hotels in Fukushima Prefecture.

Investigators say the suspects made the claim under the name of a dummy company.

Police believe other people were involved in the alleged fraud and that they submitted fake applications to steal more than 200,000 dollars in total.

Jun. 2, 2014 - Updated 02:15 UTC

Planting trees on tsunami debris

May 31, 2014

Trees planted on embankment made of tsunami debris

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140601_04.html

About 7,000 people from across Japan have planted seedlings on an embankment made of debris from the March 2011 tsunami.

The participants planted about 70,000 seedlings along a 10-meter-high embankment in the northeastern city of Iwanuma on Saturday.

The seedlings comprise 16 kinds of broad-leaved trees, including oak, and span a distance of 1.5 kilometers.

A 25-year-old man from Sendai City said he hopes they will come to serve as a symbol of reconstruction in Miyagi Prefecture.

Yokohama National University Professor Emeritus Akira Miyawaki, who proposed the project, says the fully grown trees will break the force of a tsunami and protect people on the coastline.

Similar projects are underway in other areas ravaged by the tsunami, including Otsuchi Town in Iwate Prefecture and Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture.

May. 31, 2014 - Updated 22:06 UTC

Nahara reopens town hall

June 2, 2014

Evacuated town reopens its former office

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140602_15.html

A town in the evacuation zone near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has re-opened its town hall to lay the groundwork for residents to return home.

Officials of Naraha Town began working at the hall on Monday, more than three years after the nuclear accident first erupted.

Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto told the municipal workers that the re-opening of the office is just a transit point, and he urged them to work hard so the town would become a model for the area's reconstruction.

Matsumoto also said the town would finally be able to function properly again and that officials would do their utmost to address a large number of issues.

About 20 workers are stationed at the town hall. They are carrying out routine duties such as giving residents advice on daily matters. They will also attend radiation monitoring at locations where radioactive materials have been removed.

The town hall re-opened after the mayor announced last week that it aims to allow residents to return home in about a year's time.

Almost the entire town is within the evacuation zone, and all residents have been evacuated. The municipal administration has been operating in another city in Fukushima Prefecture.

A survey by the central government in January showed that about 40 percent of the residents want to go back to their hometown. But people are still worried about radiation exposure and further problems at the crippled plant.

Jun. 2, 2014 - Updated 05:00 UTC

How far should gov't responsibility go?

Dossier 4

June 3, 2014

Govt. to review nuclear compensation law

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140603_31.html

Japan's government will review a law on compensation for accidents at nuclear power plants.

The current law stipulates that power companies in principle bear unlimited responsibility for damage payments in the event of an accident at a nuclear facility.

Critics say the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damages is not clear about how far the state should get involved in response to a nuclear power accident. They say it also does not spell out the division of responsibility between the government and power companies.

The government plans to set up a panel of senior vice ministers and other officials by mid-June to review the law.

They will study to what degree the government should bear responsibility for compensation as the promoter of nuclear energy.

They will also consider whether Japan should join an international compensation fund for serious nuclear accidents.

Jun. 3, 2014 - Updated 07:23 UTC

Interim facilities: Gov't must take residents' opinions seriously

June 3, 2014

Editorial: Consider Fukushima residents in plan for interim storage facilities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140603p2a00m0na001000c.html>

The government has started holding briefing sessions for residents in the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Okuma and Futaba over the planned construction of interim storage facilities for contaminated soil emanating from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster.

The government has hammered out more in-depth measures over the final disposal of radioactively contaminated waste and land purchases for those facilities. Because the facilities are indispensable for accelerating decontamination work and recovery efforts, it is hoped that the construction of those facilities will start at the earliest possible date.

However, residents who are pressed to accept such facilities have mixed sentiments over the plan.

The government is urged to take residents' opinions seriously and lay out concrete measures toward their livelihood rebuilding and regional development.

The interim storage facilities will accommodate up to around 25.5 million cubic meters -- or about 20 Tokyo Domes's worth -- of contaminated soil and waste generated from decontamination work in areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The government is seeking to begin putting part of the facilities to use in January next year.

Initially, the Fukushima Prefecture town of Naraha had also been among the candidate sites for the planned facilities, but after Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato demanded the size of the facilities be minimized, the central government narrowed down the candidate sites to Okuma and Futaba.

The two towns agreed to host the government's briefing sessions for residents over the construction plan but told the government that hosting the facilities is another story. Their biggest concern is that the interim storage facilities could ultimately be turned into final disposal sites.

The government plans to entrust the operation of the interim storage facilities to the government-owned Japan Environmental Safety Corp. after revising relevant laws -- in which the government will clearly state that contaminated waste will be permanently disposed of outside Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years.

That the government has presented a framework for legislating relevant measures merits credit. However, municipalities outside Fukushima Prefecture won't readily accept radioactive waste, either. Such questions were raised by residents during the government's briefing sessions in Okuma and Futaba. The government is called upon to clearly demonstrate steps toward permanently disposing of radioactive waste outside Fukushima. At the same time, the government should promote technical development to reduce the volume of waste emanating from the decontamination work.

Most of the towns in Okuma and Futaba fall within the so-called "difficult-to-return zones," but during negotiations with local landowners the government will present compensation amounts calculated on the premise that the candidate sites for interim storage facilities will be put to use in the future. The government will also look into the possibility of establishing a lease contract between landowners and the government. Furthermore, the costs for relocating graves would also be compensated, in addition to the planned creation of a flexible grant system for regional development of Okuma and Futaba.

These measures represent the government's consideration for local residents' sentiments to a certain degree. However, at the briefing sessions some residents voiced concern that construction of the interim storage facilities could tear local communities apart. Because compensation for the land lots to be used as interim storage sites will be separate from reparations paid by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, there may arise a sense of unfairness among residents of Okuma and Futaba depending on whether their land lots fall within the candidate sites for the interim storage facilities.

Under the new grant system, tens of billions of yen is said to be forked out to Okuma and Futaba. The government envisages that the funds will be used in such projects as maintaining the bonding of pre-disaster communities. The government must collaborate with municipalities to prevent the funds from becoming a mere price for causing a nuisance and lead them to be utilized for the reconstruction and revival of local communities and for the bonding of residents. The Fukushima Prefectural Government's ability to coordinate the concerned parties will also be put to the test in their efforts to develop well-balanced regional promotion measures.

May 31, 2014

Fukushima residents wary of waste facilities

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140531_28.html

Residents of 2 towns in Fukushima Prefecture have expressed concern over a government plan to build intermediate facilities for radioactive soil and waste in their towns.

540 people from the towns of Futaba and Okuma gathered in the city of Iwaki on Saturday to hear a briefing by officials from the Environment Ministry.

The 2 towns are located close to the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The officials explained the ministry's plan to buy about 16 square kilometers of land from the towns to build storage facilities. Land prices will be calculated at levels just below the price before the 2011 nuclear accident.

The land in question is unusable because it is contaminated by radiation, but the ministry says it will assess its value as land that will become usable in the future after the evacuation advisory is lifted.

The officials said the government will enact legislation to guarantee that the final disposal of the waste will be completed outside Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years after storage begins. Some residents are worried that the short term storage facilities may be used permanently for final disposal of the waste.

The participants said they are anxious that they may not be able to continue farming once the storage facilities are built due to concerns about their agricultural products. They said they may lose their hometowns, or that people outside the towns may not accept final disposal sites, making it impossible to ever remove the waste from the towns.

The government aims to start transporting nuclear waste and soil to the planned facilities starting in January. It will hold similar sessions inside and outside of Fukushima Prefecture until June 15th to seek residents' understanding.

May 31, 2014 - Updated 13:24 UTC

see also :

Fukushima people criticize waste facilities plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140531_16.html

Evacuees from 2 Fukushima towns have sharply responded to a government plan to build intermediate storage facilities for radioactive soil and waste in their hometown. [...]

"Innovation Coast": a blueprint for Fukushima

June 9, 2014

Government panel compiles new Fukushima blueprint

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140609_29.html

A Japanese government panel is calling for the creation of a major robotics research center in Fukushima Prefecture's disaster-hit coastal region.

The government-initiated panel brings together officials from municipalities in Fukushima and the private sector.

In a meeting on Monday, the panel announced its draft blueprint to revive the prefecture's coastal area, part of which hosts the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Called "Innovation Coast," the plan proposes the establishment of a robotics research hub that would focus on designing robots for the decommissioning of Fukushima Daiichi as well as for disaster relief.

The plan also calls for 5 other projects to be based along the Fukushima coast, including facilities for wind power and other renewable energies, and studies on computer-controlled farming.

The panel says the projects will create jobs for Fukushima evacuees who want to return to their homes, and bring in a new population of engineers and their families.

Panel members agreed to compile a final report by the end of the month. They will set up subpanels of experts for each project, as well as a promotional body made up of local officials.

Jun. 9, 2014 - Updated 10:54 UTC

See also :

<http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-new-decommissioning-town-an-incentive-for-evacuees-to-return-123857329.html>

Rice planted in only 2% of rice fields

June 11, 2014

Resumption of rice farming slow in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140611_11.html

NHK has learned that farmers in 6 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have resumed rice planting in only about 2 percent of available rice fields, even after restrictions were lifted in the spring.

Following the March 2011 crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, the central government restricted rice farming in 12 municipalities in the prefecture due to fears of radioactive contamination. Farmers had also voluntarily suspended rice growing.

Those restrictions and self-imposed suspensions were lifted this spring on about 5,200 hectares of land in 6 municipalities. The move followed a decline in radiation levels and the lifting of a ban on entering the areas.

In Minamisoma City, rice planting has resumed on 111 hectares, or 3.4 percent of the total area available.

This is followed by 0.2 percent in Tomioka Town, 0.1 percent in Namie and Okuma towns, and 0.06 percent in Katsurao Village. Rice planting has not been resumed at all in Futaba Town.

Municipal officials say insufficient decontamination of the rice fields and irrigation canals is one reason for the low resumption rate.

Officials in 5 of the 6 municipalities say that before resuming full-scale rice farming, they will plant rice on an experimental basis and confirm the impact of radioactivity on the crop.

The central government says it wants to proceed with decontaminating the rice fields and irrigation canals.

It also needs to address decreased motivation among farmers and local anxiety over rumors about contaminated harvests.

Jun. 11, 2014 - Updated 02:45 UTC

Large number of burglaries in evacuated areas

June 12, 2014

1,200 burglaries at Fukushima evacuated areas

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140613_05.html

Police have recorded a large number of burglaries in areas evacuated after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in 2011.

Fukushima police arrested a 34-year-old man on Thursday on suspicion of stealing clothes from an empty apartment in the town of Tomioka. The town is south of the plant and is designated an evacuation zone

due to nuclear fallout.

Police searched the man's home in Tamura, Fukushima prefecture. They confiscated more than 3,000 stolen items, including precious metals.

The man confessed to more than 100 counts of burglary, saying it was easy to steal in evacuated areas where no people were watching.

Police say in the first five months of the year, 90 cases of burglary were reported in 8 municipalities surrounding the crippled plant. It says the total figure since 2011 is about 1,200.

Police say they will increase patrols of the area.

Jun. 12, 2014 - Updated 21:18 UTC

About intermediate storage

June 16, 2014

State fails to convince Fukushima residents to accept intermediate storage facilities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406160028>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

While the central government concluded its final explanatory session on June 15 for areas near planned intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, few residents or local officials came away satisfied from the series of briefings.

Despite residents' repeated calls for an explanation about concrete steps to be taken, government officials failed to provide specifics of the plan to process and temporarily store contaminated soil and other radioactive materials.

"The government's explanation did not include any details," said Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa following the final briefing held on June 15 in Sendai. "We also feel that residents have not been reasonably satisfied."

Sixteen public sessions have been held in Tokyo and another five prefectures, for residents of the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Futaba and Okuma, where an intermediate storage facility is planned. A total of 2,605 people have participated in the 16 meetings.

Most areas of Futaba and Okuma are designated difficult-to-return zones, where radiation levels remain so high that evacuees will not be allowed to return to their homes until at least 2017.

Although three years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the central government has not given an estimate on when the residents will likely be able to return.

“The government is trying to keep us suspended in limbo and waiting for us to give up,” said a male Futaba resident who participated in the June 15 public briefing.

Concerns of the residents of Futaba and Okuma can be summarized in two points: how much the government plans to spend to purchase land and buildings in planned construction sites; and whether radioactive materials will be transferred out of Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years as the government promises.

In the 16 sessions, government officials repeatedly stressed they will determine the purchase price of lands and buildings on a case-by-case basis, and that they plan to introduce new legislation guaranteeing that radioactive debris will end up being processed outside the prefecture, though where the final disposal facilities will be constructed has yet to be decided.

Many municipal officials and residents believe that intermediate storage facilities are necessary for decontamination and reconstruction of the entire prefecture, but even those people say the government’s explanation is insufficient.

“I recognize the necessity (of the facilities), but I’m feeling somewhat dissatisfied,” said a man from Okuma at the briefing session in Sendai.

While the central government plans to start hauling radioactive debris in January from next year to an intermediate storage site in Futaba and Okuma, it is currently working to respond to requests and criticism from local officials and residents.

Fearing that their lands will be used as a final disposal site for contaminated materials, some residents of Futaba and Okuma hope to lease their properties to the government instead of selling them.

The Environment Ministry is weighing additional options to purchasing private lands. The ministry is, for example, considering borrowing private land after it is sold to the town governments of Futaba and Okuma. The ministry is also considering purchasing the rights to use lands while allowing their owners to

continue holding their proprietary rights, as well as signing lease agreements that guarantee the central government will not cancel the contracts during the 30-year debris storage period.

According to government sources, the central government intends to provide special subsidies totaling several billions of yen (several tens of millions of dollars) to the two towns, which is comparable to their annual budgets. The central government plans to present the special subsidiary proposal to Futaba and Okuma in the near future.

The central government is also considering holding additional explanatory sessions in and outside Fukushima Prefecture.

(This article was compiled from reports by Yoshitaka Ito, Takuro Negishi, Teru Okumura and Nobuyoshi Nakamura.)

Residents briefed on waste site

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140616_10.html

The Japanese government has completed a series of briefings for people from 2 towns in Fukushima Prefecture on a plan for storage facilities of radioactive soil and waste.

It has conducted 16 briefing sessions for former residents and owners of land plots to be used for the proposed intermediate storage sites in Futaba and Okuma towns near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Plant.

The government plans to purchase 16 square kilometers of land in the area.

Many residents expressed concern that the site for the final disposal has not been chosen although the waste is to be removed from Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years after storage begins.

Some residents asked the government to inform them of how much it is willing to pay for the land.

The government plans to build storage facilities and start bringing in contaminated soil and waste in January.

It must come up with a plan that prefectural and municipal governments and residents can accept.
Jun. 15, 2014 - Updated 23:18 UTC

Imperial family concerned about Fukushima's ordeals

June 14, 2014

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ THE EMPEROR AND 3/11 DISASTER (8): Akihito wanted to fly over crippled nuclear power plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406140007>

By RYUICHI KITANO/ Senior Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the eighth part of a new series under The Prometheus Trap heading. It centers on the involvement of imperial family members with victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, as well as the Fukushima nuclear accident. The series will appear on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

* * *

It's not easy saying no to the emperor, but in this case his minders had a point.

Emperor Akihito wanted to fly over the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant even though radiation was spewing from the facility following the triple meltdown there. It was a gesture he clearly thought would resonate with residents during his tour of the northeastern prefecture that hosts the stricken plant. But his aides talked him out of it.

This vignette helps to illustrate the intense preparations that Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko made for their trip to Fukushima Prefecture in May 2011, about two months after the earthquake and tsunami disaster that triggered the nuclear crisis.

They patiently sat through explanations offered by about 20 experts and government officials, including a dozen or so specialists of nuclear energy and radiation.

Grand Chamberlain Yutaka Kawashima, 72, confided in one expert that Akihito wanted to visit the nuclear plant, which by this time had been torn apart by hydrogen explosions.

Kawashima then reported to the emperor that such a visit would be difficult. At that point, Akihito inquired about flying over the nuclear plant in a Self-Defense Forces aircraft.

On April 20, 2011, Tokyo Electric Power Co. disclosed that meltdowns had occurred at three reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Two days later, local residents were prohibited from entering a 20-kilometer radius of the nuclear plant and the evacuation process went into high gear.

It was against this backdrop that the imperial couple prepared for their Fukushima visit.

Makoto Watanabe, 78, a former grand chamberlain, said, "His majesty always thought about the hibakusha in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so he clearly understood the suffering caused by the after-effects of radiation. He was greatly interested in the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident."

Whenever Akihito met with anyone from Europe who had been affected by the Chernobyl disaster, he would ask about the effects from the accident.

Watanabe also recalled what Akihito said after the Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

"With this, an accident like Chernobyl will no longer occur," the emperor said. "With the wall gone, information flow will be smoother so there will likely be no recurrence of a difficult situation in which people do not know what is happening."

Takao Kikori, 57, an official with the Fukushima prefectural government, was contacted in early April, not even a month after the Great East Japan Earthquake, by an official with the Imperial Household Agency and told that the imperial couple wanted to visit Fukushima Prefecture.

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato, 66, was eager to host the visit and show the imperial couple the sights, so to speak. On April 15, he formed a team within the prefectural government to prepare for the visit.

By then, the imperial couple were fully cognizant of what they would be facing.

On March 15, 2011, they were briefed on operations at nuclear plants and safety measures from Shunichi Tanaka, 69, who was then vice chairman of the government's Atomic Energy Commission. Tanaka now serves as chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

They also listened to various experts talking about radiation and its effect on human health.

Farm minister Michihiko Kano, 72, met with the imperial couple on April 13 and told them how the crisis had affected local agriculture and fisheries industries.

Akihito asked him, "Where will fishermen make their base in seeking to reconstruct their industry?"

On April 26, Kohei Otsuka, 54, senior vice minister of health, was called to explain what measures were being taken for medical care in the disaster-stricken areas.

When Otsuka explained about radiation standards for food, he was asked about the effects on children. That led to questions about radiation exposure levels for workers in the disaster areas as well as the removal of rubble.

Akihito asked, "Are adequate measures being taken to deal with asbestos?"

Otsuka said, "We are being sufficiently aware of the problem. The workers are all wearing face masks."

He was taken aback when Michiko then asked, "Are they using N95 masks?"

She was referring to masks designed to shut out even the smallest particles and which meet standards set in the United States. Ordinarily, a layman would not have this depth of knowledge, which was why Otsuka was so surprised.

After about an hour, a chamberlain entered the room, the signal that the lecture was over. The chamberlain called out, "Your majesty." Although Akihito nodded, the questions directed at Otsuka did not stop.

The third time the chamberlain entered the room, Otsuka finally said, "I believe the time has come." He had extended his stay by 40 minutes.

Two days before the scheduled visit to Fukushima, the imperial couple heard from Yasuhito Sasaki, 77, an executive director of the Japan Radioisotope Association.

"Their majesties were especially concerned about the effects of radiation on children," Sasaki recalled.
June 17, 2014

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ THE EMPEROR AND 3/11 DISASTER (9): Imperial couple shunned idea of special treatment during Fukushima visit

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406170003>

By RYUICHI KITANO/ Senior Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the ninth part of a new series under The Prometheus Trap heading. It centers on the involvement of imperial family members with victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, as well as the Fukushima nuclear accident. The series will appear on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko stocked up on fresh vegetables when they visited Fukushima Prefecture exactly two months after the nuclear accident triggered by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami.

Any fears they had about radiation are not recorded.

Their first stop was an evacuation center set up at the Azuma gymnasium in Fukushima city. Because the gymnasium was in the western part of the city, airborne radiation levels were comparatively low.

Takao Kikori, a Fukushima prefectural government official, was anxious about welcoming the imperial couple when radiation was still a major concern.

However, an Imperial Household Agency official told him, "Their Majesties feel there will be no problem in visiting areas where people are still living."

Kikori, now 57, initially proposed that the couple visit a central area, rather than coastal locations that were much closer to the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

An agency official said the imperial couple wanted to visit a coastal area that had been inundated by tsunami. However, the official also said the couple would be using a Self-Defense Forces helicopter to get around in Fukushima.

Kikori was relieved to hear that as radiation exposure would be less of a concern.

Shingo Haketa, the grand steward of the Imperial Household Agency, pondered whether the imperial couple should wear protective gear.

Haketa, now 72, quoted the imperial couple as saying, "There would be no need for excessive caution for ourselves if local residents are going about their daily lives without protective clothing."

In the event, the couple wore their normal clothes throughout the visit.

Fukushima Mayor Takanori Seto had mixed feelings about welcoming the couple to his city. While many of the evacuees were from the coastal part of Fukushima that experienced so much tsunami damage as well as radiation from the nuclear accident, residents of his city also faced similar concerns about radiation exposure.

"Damage from radiation is fundamentally different from tsunami damage," Seto, now 67, said. "Because it is invisible, concerns are amplified. It eats at people's souls and there are negative psychological effects, even with the passage of time. For that reason, it becomes a major barrier to reconstruction."

A pitch was made for the imperial couple to stay overnight, but the idea was shelved because there was no place adequate to accommodate them. Agency officials also initially said not to worry about providing lunch because "bento" box edibles were arriving from Tokyo.

In the end, however, the imperial couple tucked in with locals. Seto lunched with the imperial couple.

"The emperor mentioned that Fukushima was known for its fruit, such as peaches, and he expressed concern about negative publicity that could hurt such produce," Seto said.

The imperial couple had made it known beforehand that they wanted to purchase vegetables grown in Fukushima to take back to Tokyo.

The prefectural government prepared three boxes containing various produce: strawberries, broccoli and other items.

One box was taken back to the Imperial Palace and the two others ended up with Crown Prince Naruhito's family and Prince Fumihito's family.

The final stop in Fukushima Prefecture was the Nakamura Daini Elementary School in Soma. As the imperial couple rode in the SDF helicopter, they also observed a moment of silence at 2:46 p.m., the exact time two months earlier when the magnitude-9.0 earthquake struck the Tohoku region.

After meeting with evacuees at the elementary school, Akihito and Michiko thanked local police, firefighters and volunteers who had assembled at the entrance hall.

Among those who talked to the imperial couple was Toshiaki Kainuma, commander of the 13th Brigade of the Ground SDF based in Hiroshima Prefecture.

Akihito told Kainuma, now 57, "Thank you for all of your efforts to help victims of this calamity."

The 13th Brigade arrived in Soma on March 15, 2011. From May 4, members of the brigade entered Namie, which had been designated a no-entry zone because it fell within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant while radioactive materials were spewing. Brigade members searched for the missing and removed rubble washed inland by the tsunami.

They traveled one hour from their base camp to enter the 20-km radius and worked for two hours wearing protective gear before returning to the camp to undergo testing for radiation exposure.

The imperial couple peppered Kainuma with questions.

Akihito asked, "Aren't family members of brigade members worried because they enter the 20-km zone?" Kainuma responded, "We held an explanatory meeting beforehand for family members and explained that brigade members would be all right because they would wear protective clothing."

Michiko asked, "What sort of measures are you taking against radiation?"

Kainuma said, "We have established maximum accumulated exposure levels for women members to protect their bodies."

Michiko also asked, "What are you doing about health maintenance and psychological care?"

Kainuma was struck by the concern shown by the imperial couple about brigade members as this was a time when the psychological stress they were experiencing was becoming a major issue.

Younger members were not familiar with seeing so many dead bodies. In disaster-stricken areas, it was not uncommon to come across bodies that were severely disfigured or to handle the corpses of infants.

To shield SDF members from the psychological burden, teams of doctors and clinical psychologists had been formed to conduct counseling meetings.

Amid a light drizzle, the imperial couple visited the Haragama and Obama districts of Soma near the coast. When they were told tsunami had claimed 146 lives as of May 11, 2011, the imperial couple folded their umbrellas and bowed silently in the direction of those areas.

* * *

Fukushima people still unconvinced about storage

State fails to convince Fukushima residents to accept intermediate storage facilities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406160028>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

While the central government concluded its final explanatory session on June 15 for areas near planned intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, few residents or local officials came away satisfied from the series of briefings.

Despite residents' repeated calls for an explanation about concrete steps to be taken, government officials failed to provide specifics of the plan to process and temporarily store contaminated soil and other radioactive materials.

"The government's explanation did not include any details," said Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa following the final briefing held on June 15 in Sendai. "We also feel that residents have not been reasonably satisfied."

Sixteen public sessions have been held in Tokyo and another five prefectures, for residents of the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Futaba and Okuma, where an intermediate storage facility is planned. A total of 2,605 people have participated in the 16 meetings.

Most areas of Futaba and Okuma are designated difficult-to-return zones, where radiation levels remain so high that evacuees will not be allowed to return to their homes until at least 2017.

Although three years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the central government has not given an estimate on when the residents will likely be able to return.

"The government is trying to keep us suspended in limbo and waiting for us to give up," said a male Futaba resident who participated in the June 15 public briefing.

Concerns of the residents of Futaba and Okuma can be summarized in two points: how much the government plans to spend to purchase land and buildings in planned construction sites; and whether radioactive materials will be transferred out of Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years as the government promises.

In the 16 sessions, government officials repeatedly stressed they will determine the purchase price of lands and buildings on a case-by-case basis, and that they plan to introduce new legislation guaranteeing that radioactive debris will end up being processed outside the prefecture, though where the final disposal facilities will be constructed has yet to be decided.

Many municipal officials and residents believe that intermediate storage facilities are necessary for decontamination and reconstruction of the entire prefecture, but even those people say the government's explanation is insufficient.

"I recognize the necessity (of the facilities), but I'm feeling somewhat dissatisfied," said a man from Okuma at the briefing session in Sendai.

While the central government plans to start hauling radioactive debris in January from next year to an intermediate storage site in Futaba and Okuma, it is currently working to respond to requests and criticism from local officials and residents.

Fearing that their lands will be used as a final disposal site for contaminated materials, some residents of Futaba and Okuma hope to lease their properties to the government instead of selling them.

The Environment Ministry is weighing additional options to purchasing private lands. The ministry is, for example, considering borrowing private land after it is sold to the town governments of Futaba and Okuma. The ministry is also considering purchasing the rights to use lands while allowing their owners to continue holding their proprietary rights, as well as signing lease agreements that guarantee the central government will not cancel the contracts during the 30-year debris storage period.

According to government sources, the central government intends to provide special subsidies totaling several billions of yen (several tens of millions of dollars) to the two towns, which is comparable to their annual budgets. The central government plans to present the special subsidiary proposal to Futaba and Okuma in the near future.

The central government is also considering holding additional explanatory sessions in and outside Fukushima Prefecture.

(This article was compiled from reports by Yoshitaka Ito, Takuro Negishi, Teru Okumura and Nobuyoshi Nakamura.)

Residents briefed on waste site

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140616_10.html

The Japanese government has completed a series of briefings for people from 2 towns in Fukushima Prefecture on a plan for storage facilities of radioactive soil and waste.

It has conducted 16 briefing sessions for former residents and owners of land plots to be used for the proposed intermediate storage sites in Futaba and Okuma towns near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Plant.

The government plans to purchase 16 square kilometers of land in the area.

Many residents expressed concern that the site for the final disposal has not been chosen although the waste is to be removed from Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years after storage begins.

Some residents asked the government to inform them of how much it is willing to pay for the land.

The government plans to build storage facilities and start bringing in contaminated soil and waste in January.

It must come up with a plan that prefectural and municipal governments and residents can accept.
Jun. 15, 2014 - Updated 23:18 UTC

Suicide-prevention hotline in Fukushima busy

June 15, 2014

Fukushima hotline gets record calls

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/15/national/fukushima-hotline-gets-record-calls/#.U54apyji91s>

Fukushima Minpo

A suicide-prevention hotline in Fukushima Prefecture received a record 18,194 calls in 2013, signaling that scars from the events of March 2011 still weigh heavily on residents' minds.

Counselors at the hotline, Fukushima Inochi no Denwa, say consultations related to the triple disaster still stand out from the other issues.

In addition, experts say the content of the consultations has changed over time. Unlike the first days of the natural and man-made disasters, when new supply lines were in dire need, today's callers often discuss issues regarding their mental distress with the events of 3/11.

In 2011, the hotline actually handled fewer calls than the preceding year (13,677 versus 16,649), but this was only because the telephone network had been damaged by the offshore quake. The hotline's Koriyama office remained out of service for about a month afterward.

In 2012, calls surged to 17,881 before setting the current record of 18,194 last year.

According to Fukushima Inochi no Denwa, 1,618 calls in 2011 were related to the quake and the nuclear crisis. In 2012, consultations of this kind fell to 826, but counselors spent more hours talking to each person on average.

Counselors said the most recent topics range from arguments between spouses over whether to leave Fukushima because of the radiation, to the way fathers feel estranged from their families after being forced to move out of the house to find work.

Furthermore, a sense of loss and isolation, as well as pessimism about life in general, have recently stood out, the counselors said, adding that many used to mention "a sense of unity" and "the preciousness of life" in the early stage of the disasters.

One recent caller was quoted as saying, "I could not help others when the tsunami hit. It's hard." Another caller said: "I took part in rescue operations but could not rescue anyone. Now I have no confidence in continuing my work."

Shinichiro Watanabe, 66, who heads the hotline, said, "The earthquake and the nuclear accident have affected many Fukushima residents. We will provide consultations to as many people as possible."

Fukushima University professor Yuji Tsutsui, 49, who studies how disasters affect mental health, said the rise in calls is an alarming sign. He said he believes the aftereffects have reached every corner of residents' lives over the past three years. The rise in calls also reflects the diversity of the mental problems rooted in March 11.

There are 51 branches of Inochi no Denwa nationwide. The Fukushima call center was set up in 1997 and has two counselors on standby from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. year-round. More than 100 volunteers with two years of counseling training take turns on the phones. The number is 024-536-4343.

Gov't grants 80 million dollars to Fukushima Prefecture

June 17, 2014

\$ 80 mil. given to Fukushima for reconstruction

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140617_18.html

Japan's government is granting about 80 million dollars to Fukushima Prefecture and its 16 municipalities. The funds will assist local rebuilding projects since the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The Reconstruction Agency announced on Tuesday that the financial aid includes designing public rental housing for returning residents who had to evacuate. Funds have also been allocated for the resumption of farming and industrial activities.

The money is part of about 1.6 billion dollars earmarked by the central government to help local governments jump start projects in areas where evacuation orders have been being lifted.

Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto says the grants will help speed up rebuilding efforts in areas that experienced delays because of evacuation orders.

Nemoto said the government will continue providing needed aid for the prefecture's reconstruction.

Jun. 17, 2014 - Updated 04:29 UTC

Google to record reconstruction of N.E coastal areas

Google to provide views of quake-recovering areas recorded from sea

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201406190038>

By TAKESHI AOSE/ Staff Writer

Google Inc. announced June 18 that Google Street View will have a special section to record the reconstruction process of coastal areas of northeastern Japan that were devastated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Although the Internet search engine operator has already captured images of streets and collapsed buildings in the Tohoku region, the new section will have photos of the coastline taken from the sea off the Sanriku coast to chronicle how the area has recovered from the disaster. The new photos will be available on Google Street View in January.

“The recovery in coastal areas, seen from the ocean, will start on a full-scale basis from now,” said Shigeru Sugawara, the mayor of Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture. “I expect (the new service) to show to future generations the mood of recovery in these coastal areas.”

Recently, the coastal regions ravaged by the tsunami have been rapidly changing as construction work proceeds. Construction of seafood processing plants and residences are well under way, and levees to block tsunami have been planned.

Google officials said the project is meant to record the changing landscape and provide multi-angle views.

On June 18, Google photographers began taking photos from the sea off the coast of Kesenuma. When shooting images on land, Google workers lug the recording equipment on their backs. To take pictures from the sea, Google remodeled existing equipment so it could be mounted on boats.

Residents and others involved in the tourism industry and familiar with nearby waters are expected to help Google record the reconstruction progress in areas ranging from Miyako in Iwate Prefecture to Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture.

"Happy" in Fukushima

Fukushima residents make YouTube 'Happy' dance video to show life not all bad

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201406190041

URL of the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=B-pk8z8rX2U

By NAOYUKI TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--An amateur video of residents from Fukushima Prefecture dancing to the hit U.S. single "Happy" is proving to be somewhat of a minor sensation on YouTube.

The video, released just over two weeks ago to show that life goes on despite the nuclear disaster here in 2011, has already garnered 300,000 hits online.

"Even after the nuclear accident, many people are still leading 'happy' everyday lives. We wanted to show to the world the cheerful atmosphere in which we live," said Hitomi Kumasaka, the 53-year-old producer of the video.

Around 200 residents took part in the project with the aim of casting away negative impressions of their prefecture caused by the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The 2013 hit by Pharrell Williams has become an online phenomenon this year as it spawned a number of cover videos on YouTube in which people from different cities around the world dance to the soul song.

The Fukushima version starts off with Yasunori Kano, the stationmaster of JR Fukushima Station, stepping off a Shinkansen bullet train at his station.

The camera follows people of all ages dancing in their own styles against the backdrop of sightseeing spots such as the Takayu Onsen hot spring resort, shopping malls and rice fields in the cities of Fukushima, Koriyama and Date.

The dancers include famous local figures, such as actor Nasubi and Fukushima Mayor Kaoru Kobayashi. For the most part, though, the performers are everyday people, such as farmers, Buddhist monks and college students.

"The name Fukushima still tends to conjure up images of a murky place where people still walk around with masks covering their faces," said Kumasaka, who specializes in social media production.

Since she returned to her hometown last summer, the native of Fukushima city has been frustrated by what she believes is the negative image attached to the prefecture despite the fact that life has returned to normal for many people.

A cover video of “Happy” shot in Tokyo’s Harajuku district, in which shoppers and shopkeepers dance in fashionable outfits, gave her the inspiration to make the video. The Harajuku video was played 710,000 times on YouTube within 60 days of its release.

A controversy triggered by the “Oishinbo” gourmet manga series also prompted Kumasaka to produce the video. The popular manga published in April and May included episodes that depicted the nuclear devastation still posing as a serious health risk throughout the prefecture.

The video was shot in two weeks in May and posted on YouTube on June 2.

Some overseas viewers have posted messages expressing their surprise, with one casting doubt on whether it was really shot in the prefecture.

Fukushima residents responded positively to the video. Some posted comments that they wanted to participate in the project or produce videos of their own.

“For overseas viewers to realize that the happiness expressed by the dancers is not an act, they should simply come to Fukushima to see what is happening for themselves,” Kumasaka said.

Plight continues for 150,000 evacuees

June 19, 2014

Fukushima evacuees seek end to limbo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/19/national/fukushima-evacuees-seek-end-limbo/#.U6MTJrHi91s>

by Mami Maruko
Staff Writer

Japan’s economy may be picking up, but the outlook remains bleak for an often forgotten group of people: the roughly 150,000 evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture.

Living in temporary accommodations, these individuals and families were either residents in the 30-km mandatory evacuation zone or those who lived too close for comfort and fled by choice.

More than three years on, their plight continues. Following the loss of their homes and property, the government responded by offering free short-term accommodations but won't provide housing for longer periods. Many of the housing agreements are now reviewed annually.

The frustration at being uprooted is what characterizes their lives, and some are finally coming to terms with what might be the ghastly truth — that their limbo might last for a generation.

“We can't go back as long as Fukushima is not back in its original state,” said Yuya Kamoshita, of Hinan Seikatsu o Mamoru Kai, which roughly means “the group protecting evacuees' daily lives.” The group helps evacuees living in Tokyo.

Kamoshita and his family fled Iwaki to escape the radiation and moved to Tokyo. He said that unless the government presents a long-term plan with specific measures to ensure the evacuees' livelihoods, most will have difficulty settling down, finding work and finding stable schooling for their children.

The Disaster Relief Act guarantees housing for the evacuees. The units were procured from temporary housing and the rental market. But the law mandates that for only the first two years, after which the contracts are reviewed each year.

In April, a group of evacuees in Tokyo submitted a 16,000-signature petition to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet Office demanding long-term support specifically for Fukushima's nuclear evacuees and migrants.

Last month, the government decided to add another year of free housing but hinted it would be reluctant to offer the long-term extensions many evacuees are hoping for.

“It is difficult to write a new law or to revise the current one, so for now, we can only give government support in accordance with the Disaster Relief Act,” said Shoichi Kumano, senior deputy director of disaster management at the Cabinet Office.

“In the long term, we also need to look into the responsibilities of Tepco and see how much of the housing costs it can cover,” he added, referring to Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant but has been essentially nationalized since the disaster began.

Fukushima Prefectural Government figures show that there were 89,491 evacuees living in temporary accommodations in the prefecture and 48,364 elsewhere in Japan as of January 2014.

Evacuees whose original homes are not in the exclusion zone are often referred to as “voluntary evacuees” because they were not under central or local government orders to leave. There are no official figures for this group, but a survey by a local newspaper estimated that in January 2014 there were 35,000 voluntary evacuees.

These people say they had no choice but to leave, given that the radiation released by the three core meltdowns is likely to linger for decades.

Kamoshita and his family wisely fled even before the authorities sounded the alarm over the unfolding crisis at the power plant. They feared, quite simply, that the reactors would explode. Two of the buildings housing them did just that.

He now juggles two jobs in Tokyo to support his family and pay off the loan on his home in radiation-tainted Iwaki.

Kamoshita’s wife, who did not want her first name published, said although her affection for their hometown remains strong, she worries about the future impact the radiation will have on the health of their two sons, now 11 and 7.

Attorney Kenji Fukuda is a deputy representative of Saflan, a support group that represents evacuees, especially children. He is critical of the government for not taking special steps to help them since the disaster, and ignoring the fact that land contaminated with radiation poses a wholly different challenge from any that Japan has faced in the past.

“The government is simply thinking about building new houses in Fukushima, and getting evacuees to return to their hometowns,” Fukuda said. “The situation is not that simple.”

“The evacuees’ financial and psychological problems are building up. The government should think about the complicated situation they are in,” he said.

Olympics and Fukushima recovery

June 18, 2014

Fukushima governor wants Olympic torch runners to see recovery

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201406180017

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FUKUSHIMA--The governor of Fukushima said June 17 that he wants the Olympic torch relay to come to the prefecture ahead of the 2020 Tokyo games so the world can see how far the region recovered from the nuclear crisis.

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato made the proposal when he met with Yoshiro Mori, the former prime minister who heads the Tokyo organizing committee. Mori was in Fukushima as part of his tour of northern Japan devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Sato said his idea is to show the status of Fukushima's reconstruction accurately to the rest of the world. Mori said he will consider the request after reviewing further details.

Japanese officials are also considering reopening the J-Village as a training facility within the next few years so it can be used by foreign athletes to train during the Olympics.

The facility, launched in 1997 as Japan's first national football training facility, is only 20 kilometers south of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and currently serves as a base for thousands of plant workers.

But there are concerns that such ideas may not be popular among foreign athletes or visitors who are concerned about possible radiation effects from the plant.

The Fukushima plant suffered multiple meltdowns following the quake and tsunami. Its decades-long decommissioning will continue through the Tokyo Games.

The accident caused massive radiation to leak in the neighborhood, and about 100,000 people from around the plant are still being unable to return home due to fear of radiation contamination.

Good bye Mr. Yamada



Obituary of our Honorary President

<http://svcf.jp/archives/5015>

投稿日：2014年6月22日 (Skilled Veterans' Corps for Fukushima)

Dear all,

We regret having to inform you an obituary of our Honorary President Mr. Yasuteru Yamada. Though he had been under sick treatment, quite sadly he passed away at midnight on June 17, 2014. As for a memorial occasion, we will inform you later.

With deepest condolence

Nobuhiro Shiotani

President

About Mr. Yamada, see for instance:

Japan pensioners volunteer to tackle nuclear crisis

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13598607>

By Roland Buerk BBC News, Tokyo

A group of more than 200 Japanese pensioners are volunteering to tackle the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima power station.

The Skilled Veterans Corps, as they call themselves, is made up of retired engineers and other professionals, all over the age of 60.

They say they should be facing the dangers of radiation, not the young.

It was while watching the television news that Yasuteru Yamada decided it was time for his generation to stand up.

No longer could he be just an observer of the struggle to stabilise the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The retired engineer is reporting back for duty at the age of 72, and he is organising a team of pensioners to go with him.

For weeks now Mr Yamada has been getting back in touch with old friends, sending out e-mails and even messages on Twitter.

Volunteering to take the place of younger workers at the power station is not brave, Mr Yamada says, but logical.

Mr Yamada has been getting back in touch with old friends via e-mail and even messages on Twitter "I am 72 and on average I probably have 13 to 15 years left to live," he says.

"Even if I were exposed to radiation, cancer could take 20 or 30 years or longer to develop. Therefore us older ones have less chance of getting cancer."

Mr Yamada is lobbying the government hard for his volunteers to be allowed into the power station. The government has expressed gratitude for the offer but is cautious.

Certainly a couple of MPs are supporting Mr Yamada.

"At this moment I can say that I am talking with many key government and Tepco people. But I am sorry I can't say any more at this moment. It is on the way but it is a very, very sensitive issue politically," he said.

We are not kamikaze... They were going to die - but we are going to come back "

Certainly it is likely more workers will be needed.

The plant is still spewing radiation, nearly three months after an earthquake and tsunami knocked out its cooling systems, triggering explosions.

Its operator, Tepco, has now confirmed three of the reactors probably suffered meltdowns.

The plan is to bring the plant to a cold shutdown by January, although some experts believe that is over optimistic.

To cope with the disaster Japan has raised the radiation exposure limit for emergency workers from 100 millisieverts to 250 millisieverts.

But Tepco announced this week two workers at Fukushima might have already been exposed to more. Kamikaze?

Many of Mr Yamada's veterans are retired engineers like him. Michio Ito is keen to swap his apron for a radiation suit

Others are former power station workers, experts in factory design - and even a singer and two cooks - Mr Yamada says they will be useful to keep his team amused and fed.

Michio Ito used to be a primary school teacher but is spending his retirement helping out in a cafe that offers work experience to people with learning difficulties.

He is keen to swap his apron for a radiation suit.

"I don't think I'm particularly special," he says. "Most Japanese have this feeling in their heart. The question is whether you step forward, or you stay behind and watch.

"To take that step you need a lot of guts, but I hope it will be a great experience. Most Japanese want to help out any way they can."

Mr Yamada has already tried on his old overalls for size.

He says he is as fit as ever - with a lifetime of experience to bring to the task.

And he laughs off suggestions his proposed team is comparable to the kamikaze pilots who flew suicide missions in World War II.

"We are not kamikaze. The kamikaze were something strange, no risk management there. They were going to die. But we are going to come back. We have to work but never die."

Govt's help to revive industries

June 23, 2014

Govt. to help revive industries in disaster areas

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140623_38.html

Japanese leaders plan to do more to help revive industries suffering from groundless rumors following the 2011 nuclear accident.

The Reconstruction Agency compiled new guidelines for helping local businesses at a meeting on Monday attended by Minister Takumi Nemoto and bureau chiefs from related ministries.

The guidelines say the government will continue releasing the results of radioactivity tests on agricultural products from Fukushima Prefecture.

Government officials will also continue to urge foreign countries to ease or abolish import restrictions on farm and fisheries products from Japan.

The guidelines call on member companies of the Japan Business Federation, or Keidanren, to use farm products from Fukushima Prefecture as gifts and offer them at in-house sales events.

Government officials will also work to attract tourists, including students on school trips, from inside and

outside Japan.

Nemoto said businesses in disaster areas are being affected by groundless rumors. He urged the related agencies to lead the way to help give the industries a boost.

Jun. 23, 2014 - Updated 13:12 UTC

Residents check effects of decontamination

June 23, 2014

Residents near Fukushima nuke plant check effects of decontamination work

拡大写真

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140623p2a00m0na016000c.html>

IITATE, Fukushima -- Residents of this village near the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant have begun checking the effects of decontamination work in the area, as they look to the courage of their ancestors who once overcame a great famine here hundreds of years ago for strength to face the area's current trials.

These efforts are being undertaken by volunteers from the village's Hiso district. Before the nuclear disaster, there were 86 households with 339 people in the district. However, after the meltdowns the area was put under restriction due to radiation levels, and currently while free visits are allowed during the day, staying overnight is forbidden. It was not until this fiscal year that the national government's decontamination efforts truly got underway here.

In May, farmer Yoshito Kanno, 62, a former resident who evacuated to the adjacent city Nihonmatsu, joined other volunteers in taking radiation measurements at residences and on farmland in Hiso. Kanno, who used to be a member of the village's assembly, has also been involved with managing the village's historical records, through which he learned about the local history.

During the Great Tenmei famine from 1782 to 1787, abnormal weather like heavy rains and low temperatures combined with a large, ash-spewing eruption of Mount Asama in 1783 to cause massive crop failure. There were many starvation deaths in what is the modern-day Tohoku region, as well as widespread civil unrest. It is estimated to have caused at least some 300,000 deaths.

In Hiso, the Great Tenmei famine reduced the number of households from around 90 to only a handful. Historical records show that there were government measures taken to help keep people in areas like Hiso alive, such as rice rations for families with new-born children.

Kanno and the other volunteers went about their work while keeping in mind the struggles of these ancestors. "We have to endeavor to lower the radiation levels as much as we can so young people will return to the village," says Kanno. Through their work, he and the others are using their measurements to check how radiation levels differ before and after decontamination work. Should they not see improvements in the radiation levels, they will ask the government to carry out further decontamination work or may even do it themselves, they say.

Meanwhile, Kanno is also contributing to decontamination efforts by lending his farmland for use as a temporary storage site for contaminated soil before it is carried to another temporary site. He did so in response to a request from the national government, after construction at the original site the government planned to use had to be abandoned due to issues with the soil there. Wide open areas suitable for storage are few in this mountainous region, and the government told Kanno that if he didn't offer his land decontamination work would be delayed. It was not an easy decision for him to make, since it could make his land unusable for farming for some time after moving back to the village, but he says, "We can't give up now. We have to do what we can to pass this village on to the next generation."

Speaking to the Mainichi, Mayor Norio Kanno said, "The three years until now we have been dealing with evacuees. I'd like to make this year the beginning of recovery, and move forward step by step."

Iitate's population is around 6,300 people. On April 22, 2011, around 40 days after the meltdowns at the Fukushima plant, the village was designated for evacuation. In July 2012, the village was divided into three zones, one where residents cannot return for the foreseeable future -- covering 4 percent of the population -- one where daily visits are allowed but staying overnight is not allowed -- covering 83 percent of the population -- and one that is to be prepared for the return of residents in the near future, covering the remaining 13 percent of the population. From March 2016, the village government is aiming to have the evacuation order lifted from the entire village except for one area where people cannot live for the foreseeable future.

Ishihara in Fukushima

June 23, 2014

Ishihara visits Fukushima in latest apology over cash-for-storage gaffe

Kyodo

Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara on Monday apologized again for making a remark suggesting that the issue of where to store contaminated soil from the damaged Fukushima No. 1 power plant was a matter of handing out money.

his time Ishihara made the apology to Toshitsuna Watanabe, the mayor of the town of Okuma, one of the candidate sites in Fukushima Prefecture for building temporary storage facilities.

On June 16, Ishihara told reporters that protracted negotiations between the central and local governments would ultimately be settled by the “monetary value” of accepting interim storage facilities, such as grants to the local authorities hosting them.

He suggested that money would ultimately decide whether local authorities accept the central government’s proposal for the facilities.

Watanabe told Ishihara at a meeting Monday that many residents were hurt by the remark, but that the town would accept his apology, noting that the minister came to Fukushima Prefecture to apologize.

The meeting between the minister and the mayor was held in Aizuwakamatsu, where the Okuma Municipal Government has been relocated while the town, which hosts the plant, remains evacuated.

Later on Monday, Ishihara was to meet with the mayor of Futaba, Shiro Izawa, in the city of Iwaki. Futaba is another candidate site for the temporary storage facilities.

See also :

<http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-ishihara-apologizes-123979023.html>

This is not my house!

June 24, 2014

Plaintiffs return to examine damage nuclear disaster did to their homes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406240004>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

TOMIOKA, Fukushima Prefecture--When Keiko Sawauchi returned to her home here on a recent visit, the 60-year-old piano teacher could not even bring herself to look at her “partner.”

It has become too unbearable for her to see the continuing deterioration of her grand piano over time during each visit home.

Sawauchi, who gave piano lessons to children in her neighborhood, never approached the musical instrument during her brief stay in her home, about 7 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, on June 21.

“My son says I can save up my money and buy a new piano,” said Sawauchi, who has evacuated to Chiba Prefecture. “But none of my students will return to an area like this that has a reading of high radiation doses.”

She said her grand piano can no longer produce beautiful notes as it has been damaged by high humidity and neglect. It has been left unattended for the more than three years since she was forced to flee her home when the disaster unfolded at the nuclear complex on March 11, 2011, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

On this visit, Sawauchi returned to examine the scope of the damage done to her house. She is one of about 3,000 plaintiffs who filed a damage suit against Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, and the central government in March 2013. They are demanding the restoration of their lives before the disaster and compensation in the suit filed with the Fukushima District Court.

Sawauchi's home sits in an area where the central government says former residents can eventually rebuild their communities after the current and future decontamination operation.

Her visit to her home was the first in about a year. But it is not the residence she had long known. When she opened the front door, which was almost covered by overgrown plants, she smelled the foul stench of small animals.

Her living and dining rooms were filled with rat droppings.

There were also signs that small animals such as raccoon dogs and masked palm civets had entered and overrun the interior.

In addition, many of her kimono and sashes stored in a Japanese-style chest had been stolen.

“What a mess! This is not my house,” she whispered.

Sawauchi decided to join the suit after she heard Izutaro Managi, a lawyer who leads the secretariat of the team of lawyers representing the plaintiffs.

“It is not anything virtuous for people in Tohoku to endure this,” she recalled Managi saying, referring to the patience and perseverance for which people in the northeastern region are known. She is aware of the enormity of her adversaries.

“I am just like an ant that is biting the foot of an elephant,” Sawauchi said. “But biting together with others, I want to have TEPCO feel even a slight pang of pain.”

Some of the plaintiffs are facing even the permanent loss of their homes.

Yuji Fukuda, 66, who operated a business to install machinery and devices in Futaba, a town that co-hosts the nuclear complex, said he has no idea when, or even if, he can return to his home to live.

The home of Fukuda and his wife, Ikuko, 59, is situated 5 kilometers from the plant. With an estimated annual radiation dose of more than 50 millisieverts, evacuees from the area are less likely to be able to return for many years.

Radiation levels dropped due to natural decay, but they are still registering at 6-7 microsieverts per hour.

“We cannot tell at all how long we should wait before we are able to return home,” Fukuda said. “We are evacuation refugees, sort of a derelict ship just drifting without anyone at the wheel.”

The floor of Fukuda's home was so corroded that a group of 24 lawyers and plaintiffs who were visiting that day could not enter at the same time due to the danger of collapse. The house had been left virtually unattended for more than three years. It was difficult for the couple to return to care for their home even for a short period, because of high radiation levels in the neighborhood. Signs that small animals had broken into the house added to their misery.

“Do you understand how humiliating it is for us to have to show our IDs to strangers and gain permission from the central government to even visit our home?” Fukuda asked.

The legal team plans to ask the court to conduct onsite inspections of the homes of evacuees and related facilities by around October.

Summer without nukes

June 25, 2014

Japan to experience nuclear-free summer

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406250047>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s delayed application for safety screenings of two reactors means Japan will be without nuclear energy this summer for the first time since the Fukushima nuclear accident started in March 2011.

The utility on June 24 submitted additional documents to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for its application to restart the idled reactors at the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

The NRA will announce the results of the screening, possibly in early July. It will then gather opinions on the results over 30 days and reach a final decision on whether to allow Kyushu Electric to restart the two reactors at the Sendai plant.

However, the utility must also obtain NRA approval for other items, such as facility designs and emergency procedures for accidents, under stricter safety standards.

The NRA will likely complete all the necessary screening processes at the Sendai plant in August at the earliest.

But it will take one or two months to inspect the nuclear plant before its operations can resume. That means Kyushu Electric will be able to restart its reactors in September at the earliest, even if it meets other conditions, such as obtaining consent from local governments.

Currently, the NRA safety screening of the Sendai plant has progressed furthest among all nuclear plants seeking to restart their reactors. The two reactors are expected to be the first to resume operations in Japan.

Kyushu Electric had submitted a revised application form to the NRA at the end of April, but it was found to contain 42 flaws.

The utility said it would modify the 42 portions by the end of May. However, the revisions took nearly a month longer to complete.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami led to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, more than 10 reactors were operating in the summer that year.

But their operations were later suspended for regular inspections, and restarting them required NRA approval under the new safety standards.

All reactors in Japan were temporarily offline. But in July 2012, the Democratic Party of Japan-led government allowed Kansai Electric Power Co. to restart two reactors at its Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture. Those operations continued until September 2013.

In the absence of nuclear power generation, utilities have increased thermal power generation while the government has called on the public to conserve energy during the peak summer period.

According to government calculations, Kansai Electric's average reserve rate--the margin by which supply exceeds demand--will be 1.8 percent this summer. The rate for Kyushu Electric is estimated at 1.3 percent.

Both figures are lower than the minimum requirement of 3 percent.

However, the utilities will be able to achieve the 3-percent rate by receiving electricity from Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Considering the public's heightened awareness of energy conservation, the government has decided not to ask residents in specific areas to refrain from using electricity during certain hours of a day.

TEPCO "breaking its vow" on compensation

June 27, 2014

TEPCO balks at paying extra 50,000 yen to residents in nuclear disaster settlement

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140627p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has flatly refused a proposal by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center (ADR) to increase compensation payments for psychological damage suffered by people from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie, near the company's crippled nuclear power plant.

The center had proposed increasing monthly compensation payments for roughly 15,000 people in the town by 50,000 yen to 150,000 yen each.

TEPCO's unusual refusal of the center's settlement proposal could raise questions over the value of the center's existence. Angry town officials say the company has completely failed to understand the pain of victims, and the town has submitted a petition to the center, calling for it to persuade TEPCO to accept the proposal.

About 70 percent of residents from the town sought resolution through the ADR in May last year, with the town acting as their proxy. They requested that the government's interim guidelines for psychological damage resulting from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant be increased from 100,000 yen to 350,000 yen.

In March this year, the center said that psychological damage had increased from when the government guidelines were set, and proposed that the amount of compensation for the second and third years from the disaster be increased by 50,000 yen per month to 150,000 yen (an overall increase of about 1.2 million yen). For people aged 75 or over, the center proposed granting an additional 30,000 yen per month.

In a response dated June 25, TEPCO argued that the center had accepted a blanket increase without considering the individual circumstances of the petitioners, and that this deviated from guidelines. It added that from the perspective of fairness with other evacuees, the increase would have too much of an effect.

The compensation amount in Namie alone exceeds 20 billion yen, and TEPCO is apparently concerned about the effects any increases could have on other municipalities. Regarding additional funds for the

elderly, TEPCO said the payment should be restricted to those who are injured or ill and set at 20,000 yen per month.

Under three pledges in a comprehensive business plan that TEPCO submitted to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in December last year, the utility stated that it would "respect ADR settlement proposals." The company had never refused settlement proposals involving residents who were not employed by TEPCO.

"By breaking the three pledges, (TEPCO) has betrayed its loyalty and been incredibly insincere," Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba said.

June 27, 2014

TEPCO 'breaks vow,' refuses more compensation for Fukushima nuclear victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406270055>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has rejected requests for additional compensation from residents forced to evacuate because of the nuclear disaster, defying a government mediation center, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

Prompted by a request from 15,000 residents of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, or more than 70 percent of the town's population, the central government's nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center in March issued a proposed settlement calling for Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay an additional 50,000 yen (\$492) per month to each town evacuee.

In the proposed settlement, accepted by the town residents, the mediation center also asked the utility to pay an additional 30,000 yen per month to those aged 75 or older.

But TEPCO rejected the proposal for an across-the-board 50,000-yen payment and said it would offer an additional 20,000 yen a month only to residents 75 years or older who have suffered injuries or illnesses, in letters sent to the town and the dispute resolution center on June 25.

"Its response substantively represents the absolute refusal of the proposal," Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba commented the following day. "It does not understand the pain of victims at all."

Because TEPCO has said it would honor compromise settlements proposed by the mediation center, Baba criticized the plant operator for “breaking its vow.”

In March 2012, a year after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the central government’s Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation released guidelines on compensation for the emotional distress of nuclear victims.

According to the guidelines, TEPCO has to pay monthly compensation of 100,000 yen per person to 80,000 residents of mandatory evacuation zones around the nuclear plant.

The company has been complying with the recommendations.

“(The requests from Namie residents) deviate from the guidelines and can undermine a sense of fairness,” Yuji Masuda, a TEPCO managing executive officer, explained at a shareholders' meeting on June 26.

TEPCO also took issue with the dispute resolution center’s argument that the utility should provide additional compensation because evacuees “are currently living in an extremely unstable condition where they cannot see any future prospects.”

In the letters sent to the town and the center, the utility said the status of those evacuees was already taken into account when the compensation guidelines were compiled.

The Namie residents on June 26 asked the dispute resolution center to persuade TEPCO to pay the proposed extras. The center plans to discuss the issue with the company again, and if TEPCO refuses to accept the proposal, the evacuees will possibly sue the utility for additional compensation.

A local government group, consisting of eight municipalities in the prefecture’s Futaba county, including Namie, has also demanded that TEPCO and the central government make changes to the guidelines and pay additional compensation to all their residents.

(This article was compiled from reports by Senior Staff Writer Noriyoshi Otsuki, Yu Kotsubo and Mana Nagano.)

Evacuees make difficult choice (NHK video)

June 26, 2014

Evacuees from Fukushima Make Difficult Choice

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201406262021.html>

A lot of evacuees have given up hope to ever return.

Whatever decision they reach (make a fresh start elsewhere, sometimes far away from their beloved homeland and ancestors, or wait until the situation improves), people face tough decisions.

They don't always have the option to choose and some are forced to continue to live in temporary housing.

Ways of luring people back to Fukushima?

June 30, 2014

Evacuation zone town sets up firm to prompt return

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140630_24.html

A community-based organization has been set up to support residents who will return to a town near the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant after an evacuation order is lifted.

Most of Naraha Town remains in an evacuation zone more than 3 years after the 2011 nuclear accident. The town is aiming for residents to return early next year, after decontamination work is over.

Naraha needs to rebuild its communities. Many houses have been abandoned. Some residents have reportedly lost their desire to return.

Town officials, residents and members of the local business association gathered at a town facility on Monday to establish the support organization.

Participants agreed the organization will provide services such as keeping the houses in order and weeding residents' gardens. Other services will include building ties among residents, and consultations on radiation exposure.

The organization staff will include three town officials and volunteers. A makeshift office will be set up in neighboring Iwaki City.

Jun. 30, 2014 - Updated 09:16 UTC

Fukushima town opens after-school study program

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140630_19.html

A town near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has launched a free after-school study program to encourage families evacuated after the March 2011 disaster to move back.

Hirono Town launched the program for junior-high school students to allay parents' concerns about its educational environment. The town is located 20 to 25 kilometers from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Most of Hirono's 5,200 residents were evacuated after the accident. Only about 1,500, or about 30 percent, have returned. They include about 50 children who returned to the town's junior high school, down from about 230 before the disaster.

The new program was launched at a community hall on Saturday.

4 tutors, some university students, from Tokyo instructed on problem solving and answered 8 students' questions on tackling subjects they found difficult.

One student said the lessons were easy to understand and that the program offered a good opportunity to study.

Hirono Mayor Satoshi Endo said improving the educational environment is important to nurture the next generation responsible for the town's future.

The program will be offered about twice a month until February next year.

Jun. 30, 2014 - Updated 07:51 UTC

Become a supporter for TEPCO's plaintiffs?

July 2, 2014

Supporters sought for Fukushima nuclear crisis evacuee lawsuit vs. TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140702p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Supporters are being sought to sit in on court proceedings for the "Sapporo lawsuit" brought against Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) by over 200 Fukushima nuclear crisis evacuees now living in Hokkaido.

The call for support is being issued by one of the plaintiffs, Takako Shishido, 41, who said that some of the courtroom's 80 seats occasionally go unclaimed.

"The act of sitting together with us defendants in order to fill the courtroom would be an incredibly supportive gesture for evacuees," commented Shishido, who now resides in Sapporo's Atsubetsu Ward.

The class action suit was first filed in June 2013 by 43 evacuees from 13 households, seeking damages from the national government and TEPCO in the amount of 16.5 million yen per person.

Oral arguments have been heard in the case four times so far. Although the courtroom was packed the first time, subsequent hearings have only been about 70 percent full. Since the hearings take place on weekday afternoons, economic constraints mean that it is difficult for the plaintiffs to take time off work to attend the sessions.

Shishido herself was a full-time employee while living in Fukushima Prefecture, but is now doing part-time work in Sapporo as a caregiver, while her husband is also employed part-time. Consequently, their household income has shrunk.

Many women who evacuated with their children, meanwhile, have found themselves raising their children while trying to get by on an unstable income.

Shishido came up with the idea to seek courtroom supporters as a way to encourage people to keep paying attention to the nuclear disaster, while simultaneously offering encouragement to evacuees.

The court case itself offers plaintiffs the opportunity to share their motivations for evacuating, as well as their current living situations.

"The nuclear disaster has not yet been resolved," Shishido commented. "By coming to listen to the proceedings, I'd like people to consider the matter of what would happen if a nuclear accident occurred here in Hokkaido."

Those interested in becoming supporters will receive a schedule of courtroom hearings and outside study sessions via e-mail. For further information, send a message to ippohumidasu@gmail.com
July 02, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Gov't asks Japanese people to save power

July 1, 2014

Govt. calls for seasonal power saving nationwide

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140701_29.html

Japanese people are experiencing the first summer in which they have to endure heat without power from nuclear plants since the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in March 2011.

The government is calling on households and firms across the nation to save power. But it hasn't set specific targets.

The power-saving campaign calls on people to try to save power from 9AM to 8PM on weekdays starting Tuesday through September 30th.

All nuclear reactors in Japan are now offline.

The government says although the minimum necessary amount of power to ensure a stable supply will be secured, the country has to be ready for possible emergencies.

Kansai Electric Power in western Japan and Kyushu Electric Power in southwestern Japan have been more dependent on nuclear power than other utilities. They're not expected to be able to fully meet demand on their own. The 2 utilities will receive power from their counterparts in eastern Japan.

The government indicated that it may set specific power-saving targets if it becomes hotter than expected or if any problems happen at power stations this summer.

Jul. 1, 2014 - Updated 04:46 UTC

Evacuees decide not to return

July 3, 2014

Some Fukushima evacuees give up returning home

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140704_04.html

Some evacuees from a no-entry zone in Fukushima Prefecture are asking for more public support to acquire new houses outside their hometown. They are giving up returning as radiation levels remain high more than 3 years after the nuclear accident.

The evacuees are from the Nogami No.1 administrative district of Okuma Town. The area lies about 8 kilometers west of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The evacuees say they have no choice but to give up returning to the town as they cannot see any prospect of restoring infrastructure due to high radiation levels.

They claim their houses and farmland are ruined.

They add they are concerned about the safety of an intermediate storage facility for nuclear waste planned to be built in the town.

The evacuees say compensation from the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, and other financial aid they have been receiving is not enough to rebuild their lives.

They asked the Okuma government to request more state compensation for evacuees who have given up returning home, rather than for decontamination. They also called on the municipal government to present support measures for them.

The head of the district, Jin Kowata, says the town government should work not only for evacuees hoping to return home but also for those giving up the idea.

As of October of last year, 67 percent of the Okuma evacuees who answered a government questionnaire said they did not wish to return home under current conditions.

Jul. 3, 2014 - Updated 20:55 UTC

Public meeting in Ibaraki

July 5, 2014

Reactor operator explains safety to residents

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140705_13.html

The operator of the Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, north of Tokyo, has held a public meeting to explain its safety measures. The utility has applied for a government safety screening to restart operations at the idled plant.

Japan Atomic Power Company held its first public meeting on Friday evening for residents in the Shirakata district of Tokai village, which hosts the plant.

Sources say more than 20 people attended.

According to the sources, utility officials explained safety measures such as building an embankment to prevent a tsunami from damaging the plant. The embankment would be more than 18 meters high.

The officials also told local residents about plans to equip the plant with devices called filter vents to be used in the event of an accident.

The residents asked for details about the embankment and about how the plant would secure power sources during emergencies.

Some participants said they got the impression that progress is being made on safety measures. But others said there wasn't enough time to ask questions to dispel their concerns.

The head of the utility's Tokai office, Tetsuya Shimamori, said the company wants to devise a better way to brief the public on its safety measures.

The meetings will be held in all 30 districts of Tokai city by the end of August.

Japan Atomic Power Company applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for a safety check in May.

Disaster-related deaths (NHK video)

Nuclear Watch

Aired on Jul. 2

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201407020500.html>

The "silent killer" has killed over 3,500 people in Fukushima Pref. since 3/11, more than the number of people actually killed by the tsunami on the day of the disaster. This is also what's called "disaster-related deaths".

People's physical and/or mental problems (suicides, alcoholism, depression etc.) are aggravated by long-term evacuation.

"We must try harder" (to help), says the director of Nagoni help center, Kazuma Tonakura.

Gov't relies on people to save power

July 6, 2014

Gov't depends on energy-saving efforts by households as summer heat approaches

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140706p2a00m0na005000c.html>

As Japan begins its first summer without nuclear power since it adopted atomic energy, the government is depending on households to account for around 30 percent of the power-saving efforts it is calling for across the nation.

Under government estimates, energy-saving efforts across the country should range from 3 to 11 percent as compared to 2010 summer levels to keep the power supply at an acceptable level. For the areas supplied by the Kansai Electric Power Co. and the Kyushu Electric Power Co., the cuts in energy use are to be, respectively, 8.5 percent, or 2.63 million kilowatts, and 9.2 percent, or 1.61 million kilowatts. Around 20 percent of cuts in these two areas are supposed to come from savings at households.

In the summer of 2011, after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear disaster, national energy usage peaked at 156.61 kilowatts, over 10 percent less than that of the previous year's summer. In the following years, however, energy use rebounded. With the economic recovery this year, summer energy use is expected to exceed that of 2011's summer by 6 percent or more.

In a June 2011 survey by Mizuho Information & Research Institute Inc., 55 percent of around 400 people surveyed in the area serviced by Tokyo Electric Power Co. said they thought there was a "very serious energy shortage," but in a September 2013 survey that percentage was down to 23 percent. "There is the possibility that energy-saving efforts will falter (this summer)," warns the institute.

As for how to save energy at home, a Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry official advises, "The way air conditioners are used is the key." By ministry estimates, for the regions from Tohoku to Kyushu, when daily energy usage peaks at 2 p.m. air conditioners are responsible for 58 percent of home energy usage, followed by refrigerators at 17 percent and televisions at 5 percent. The ministry estimates that raising air conditioners' temperature settings from 26 degrees Celsius to 28 degrees Celsius will cut overall home energy use by around 10 percent. However, taking such energy savings measures too far during hot weather carries the risk of heat stroke, so residents should drink plenty of fluids and keep room temperatures at an appropriate level.

Masato Nojiri, head of the home and personnel division at the Energy Conservation Center, Japan, says, "Energy-saving measures that don't have to be repeated every day are effective." One example is lowering the brightness of a television screen by setting it on energy-saving mode. According to Nojiri, depending on the television model this can result in yearly energy bill savings of around 600 to 3,340 yen.

"There is no need to go overboard. What is important is trying to streamline the way you use electrical appliances," says Nojiri.

Local seafood event in Fukushima

July 7, 2014

Local fish enjoyed by people in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140707_11.html

People in Fukushima Prefecture have enjoyed dining on local seafood at an event held by fish wholesalers.

On Sunday, 500 servings of fish that were caught during test-fishing were cooked and offered for free to residents of Iwaki city.

After the nuclear accident on March 11th, 2011, fishing off the coast of Fukushima was halted. Test-fishing began in 2012 for limited species of marine products.

Fish, shellfish and other products are being sent to market only if the catch is confirmed safe after radiation testing.

In Sunday's event, a fish called "mehikari" and crab soup were served.

A 68-year-old woman who tried the dishes said it was a nostalgic meal, as it's been a long time since she's had local seafood.

The head of the area's wholesalers association, Hiromitsu Endo, said he wants people in Iwaki to rediscover the great taste of local fish.

Jul. 7, 2014 - Updated 01:23 UTC

Compensation to families of dead victims of evacuation cut by half

July 9, 2014

Compensation halved over nuclear disaster victims' deaths during evacuation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140709p2a00m0na003000c.html>

The government-backed center that handles the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) for the Fukushima nuclear disaster has halved the amount of compensation that the operator of the crippled plant must pay in most cases over the deaths of nuclear disaster victims during evacuation, it has been learned.

The Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center has set the contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster to the deaths of most victims during evacuation at 50 percent to halve the amount of compensation to their bereaved families.

Hiroshi Noyama, former head of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry section that serves as secretariat to the center, made the admission in an exclusive interview with the Mainichi Shimbun.

Noyama defended the practice, saying the center must quickly handle disputes, while admitting that there are some cases for which full amounts of compensation should have been paid.

"In some cases, we can recognize that the contribution ratio of the nuclear accident to deaths is 100 percent. But we assess the ratio is 50 percent in most settlement plans. If we are to carefully deliberate each case, we couldn't maintain the current pace of deliberations (an average of about six months per case)," he said. "This is the best thing that the center can do. If you're dissatisfied with the practice, please file a lawsuit," Noyama said.

The revelations highlight the insufficiency of relief measures for nuclear disaster victims.

In nuclear ADR processes, lawyers who serve as mediators at the center work out settlement plans in response to petitions from victims and show the plans to both the victims and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima nuclear plant.

About 260 mediators are supposed to screen petitions independently. However, mediators often consult with the secretariat at the ministry over the details of settlement proposals to prevent conditions for reconciliation from varying from case to case.

Noyama said the secretariat summoned some "influential" mediators to the center and proposed to set the contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster to the deaths of evacuees at about 50 percent, considering that evidence cannot be sufficiently examined. The mediators present at the meeting accepted the proposal.

Of the settled disputes that the center has disclosed on its website, 26 involve compensation for deaths of evacuees. The specific contribution ratios of various factors to the deaths are specified in 11 of these cases.

In 10 of the 11 cases, the contribution ratio of the nuclear crisis is 50 percent and 7 to 9 million yen in compensation was paid to the victims' bereaved families. In the other case, the contribution ratio was 90 percent and 16.2 million yen in damages was paid to the bereaved family.

In another case of death besides these 11 cases, the Mainichi Shimbun has confirmed from the bereaved family that the center assessed the value of the damage for the death is 18 million yen and determined that the contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster is 50 percent. The center then offered a settlement plan under which TEPCO would pay the bereaved family 9 million yen in damages. The settlement has already been reached.

The ADR system for the nuclear disaster was established to make it easier for nuclear disaster victims to seek compensation from TEPCO because it costs much money and takes a long time to launch damage suits.

There exist two sets of criteria for compensation for nuclear accidents, one created by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, with which the center is affiliated, and one set by the center, both of which have been disclosed. The criteria shows the scope of those who are entitled to compensation as well as the period and the amount of compensation payments. However, the 50-percent rule has not been publicized anywhere.

A center official defended the practice. "The 50 percent rule is merely an unofficial indication, and not part of the official criteria, so we don't have to disclose it."

TEPCO has declined to comment on the amount of compensation paid over the deaths of nuclear victims during evacuation. "We're not in a position to comment on the contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster, but we understand that mediators at the center propose settlement plans based on the circumstances surrounding each individual case," said an official with the TEPCO public relations division.

How to use celebrities

July 11, 2014

Celebrities offer services, expertise to help launch new Fukushima school

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201407110060>

By YUKIKO SEINO/ Staff Writer

An astronaut, former Olympians, a renowned international architect and a rising politician are part of the star power that will conduct classes and assist extracurricular activities at a school to open next year in Futaba county, which hosts the embattled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The 11-member guest staff will include astronaut Naoko Yamazaki, hurdler Dai Tamesue, architect Tadao Ando, politician Shinjiro Koizumi, writer Hirotsugu Otake, badminton player Reiko Shiota and playwright Oriza Hirata.

The Reconstruction Agency announced the lineup on July 10. The prefectural school serving junior and high school levels will open in April in Hirono, a town in Futaba county in Fukushima Prefecture. The town is located between 20 kilometers and 30 km from the plant.

The establishment of the school is part of an initiative to rebuild the region ravaged by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. The move for guest staffers to help out at the school came after local education officials in May called for the creation of such a program.

Koizumi, a Reconstruction Agency parliamentary secretary, delivered the news in person when he visited the Tomioka board of education in Koriyama. The board shifted its offices there from the town of Tomioka after the nuclear disaster unfolded in March 2011.

“We want to give a boost to children who are struggling in an environment that the nation has not previously seen,” said Koizumi, a member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the Lower House and a son of popular former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. “We want to be of assistance in creating a model school.”

The team will offer up to 100 hours a year to conduct classroom sessions and coach after-school sports clubs.

The guest staff is expected to add more members.

Eight localities constitute Futaba county, including Futaba and Okuma, which co-host the plant. Many students in the district remain evacuees from the nuclear disaster and are still attending classes in makeshift schools.

Suing TEPCO over wife's suicide

July 10, 2014

Fukushima farmer takes on Tepco over wife's suicide check

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/07/10/national/fukushima-farmer-takes-tepco-wifes-suicide/#.U76vRrHi91s>

by Mari Saito and Lisa Twaronite
Reuters

The Fukushima District Court is due to rule next month on a claim that Tokyo Electric Power Co. is responsible for a woman's suicide, in a landmark case that could force the utility to publicly admit culpability for deaths related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

In July 2011, nearly four months after the massive earthquake and tsunami that triggered a series of catastrophic failures at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Hamako Watanabe returned to her still-radioactive hilltop home, doused herself in kerosene and set herself on fire.

She left no suicide note but her husband, Mikio, says plant operator Tepco is directly responsible.

"If that accident hadn't happened, we would have lived a normal, peaceful life" on their family farm some 50 km from the plant, said Watanabe, now 64, who discovered her charred body.

The Fukushima District Court is expected to rule in late August on Watanabe's lawsuit, which Tepco is contesting. The outcome could set a precedent for claims against the struggling utility, said Watanabe's lawyer, Tsuguo Hirota.

The triple meltdowns at the plant forced more than 150,000 people from their homes. Most of them remain displaced and about a third, including Watanabe, are living in temporary housing.

The utility has settled a number of suicide-related claims through a government dispute resolution system, but declined to say how many or give details on how much it has paid.

Japan has made public 25 disaster-related death cases that were settled through the resolution system, some for more than ¥16 million. Causes of death were not always specified, and include those due to natural causes, such as elderly patients who died in evacuation centers. A Mainichi report this week said arbitrators were encouraged to automatically halve requested damage to expedite the process.

Tepco said it could not comment on pending cases, including Watanabe's.

Watanabe has so far declined to settle outside of court and has broken off contact with relatives who urged him to drop his suit. His oldest son left his job after co-workers harassed him, accusing him of using his mother's death for personal gain. Watanabe is seeking more than ¥91 million in damages.

"No matter what verdict I get in August, I just want my wife to rest in peace," Watanabe said.

Like her husband, Hamako had grown up in Yamakiya, a rural pocket of farms and rice paddies surrounded by hills inside the town of Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture. Being forced to leave plunged her into a sudden and deep depression, he said.

"For them to argue that the suicide is not directly related is unforgivable," Watanabe said.

Hirota, Watanabe's lawyer, said the verdict could set the stage for others who have experienced losses as a result of the nuclear disaster to take similar legal action.

"For the claimants, it's not about the money. They want to know what the meaning of their husband's death was, or why their mother had to perish this way," he said.

Kazuo Okawa, an Osaka-based lawyer who has spent over three decades representing victims of Minamata disease, a neurological syndrome caused by mercury poisoning from industrial wastewater, said that courts in Japan generally tend to favor companies in liability cases.

Civil suits are uncommon in Japan, where victims are far more likely to skirt arduous court battles and accept settlements.

"There are massive hurdles to go to court in Japan. It takes a long time for court cases to proceed and this discourages many victims," Okawa said. "If they felt they had a chance of winning they still might, but that hasn't always been the case."

The case also highlights what advocates call a quiet crisis of depression in Japan's disaster zone, which many say has gone unnoticed in a culture that values stoicism and stigmatizes mental illness.

“Their houses are still there, but they can’t go back,” said Shinichi Niwa, a professor of psychiatry at Fukushima Medical University, who said that displacement contributed to anger, despair and suicide.

Between 2011 and 2013, suicides declined 11 percent across Japan. Suicides in Fukushima had also been decreasing in the years before the disaster, but deaths have ticked up in the past two years.

Since April 2011, there have been more than 1,500 suicides in the prefecture. Authorities have so far ruled 54 of those deaths to be “disaster related.”

The central government has dispatched counselors, appointed a government minister in charge of suicide prevention and provided funding to local organizations for survivors and evacuees like Watanabe.

Tepco was bailed out with taxpayer funds in 2012 and expects to spend more than \$48 billion in compensation alone, and billions more for a decades-long costly decommission.

The utility currently pays all nuclear evacuees a stipend of roughly \$1,000 a month for emotional distress caused by the accident. Tepco also provides compensation to those who lost their jobs and partially pays for the value of their homes, depending on the length of their forced evacuation. Those evacuees living in areas that have no timeline for their return receive payment for the full value of their homes.

The utility remains under pressure to cut costs as plans to restart its remaining nuclear complex in Japan’s northwest have stalled in the face of local opposition.

Last month, Tepco rejected a request by residents of Namie — less than 10 km from the destroyed plant — to raise their monthly compensation for mental distress.

Watanabe’s house is still in an exclusion zone, where traffic is restricted to former residents and decontamination crews. He now lives alone in prefabricated housing on what used to be a sports field and regularly commutes to maintain the empty home, and the yard where his family used to have barbecues and watch the fireflies blinking under the stars.

After evacuating, Watanabe’s family moved through a series of shelters before finding a small apartment. Then he and Hamako lost their jobs at a local chicken farm when it closed as the public shunned food from Fukushima.

“She worried constantly and kept asking, ‘What will we do next?’ and ‘How can we pay our house loan?’ “

In late June 2011, Hamako begged Watanabe to take her home. He agreed to go to their house and spend one last night there, hoping the familiar settings would put her at ease.

On June 30, Hamako cooked in the kitchen while her husband cleared the neck-high brush around the house. After, they sat together by a window with a sweeping view of their property. She seemed happy, Watanabe said. She asked him if they really had to leave the next day.

“She said, ‘Well you can go back, but I want to stay here even if that means living alone. I never want to leave my home.’ I told her, ‘Don’t be stupid, we have to leave together.’ “

The next morning, Watanabe resumed clearing brush. In the distance, under the spreading boughs of a tall tree, he noticed a fire. He assumed his wife was burning trash as usual, and continued working.

273km to find a shelter - The sad story of evacuees

July 13, 2014

Survey: Fukushima evacuees traveled average 273 km in search for shelter

July 13, 2014

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407130019>

By HISASHI HATTORI/ Senior Staff Writer

Evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster moved to different shelters an average of four times and traveled 273 kilometers during the month after the crisis unfolded in March 2011, a survey showed.

The joint survey by the University of Tokyo and Nagoya University on about 10,000 evacuees showed that they traveled an average of 57 km during their first relocation, mainly to their relatives’ homes or evacuation centers.

Their second attempt to find shelter covered an average distance of 81 km, and they increasingly looked for private rental housing, public housing, hotels and inns, the survey found.

Their third and fourth moves to find shelter within the month were on average 102 km and 112 km, respectively.

Over the year following the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the evacuees changed shelters 4.9 times on average, according to the survey.

It is the first extensive survey to provide such details about the voluntarily evacuation of Fukushima residents after the nuclear disaster. The results are expected to help local municipalities located around nuclear plants map out their evacuation plans.

According to the survey, 76 percent of evacuees said they or their family members drove their cars to flee the disaster, while 10 percent said they were driven in the vehicles of acquaintances. They spent an average of 51,253 yen (\$506) for gas charges, train fare and bus tickets.

As many as 42 percent of the respondents said their family members became separated during the evacuation.

The survey was conducted by a team led by Naoya Sekiya, a special-appointed associate professor of disaster information studies at the University of Tokyo, and Yu Hiroi, an associate professor of urban disaster prevention at Nagoya University.

The education ministry commissioned the survey.

The team sent questionnaires to 41,754 people who left the no-entry zones and other areas affected by the nuclear disaster in March 2012 and received valid response from 10,082.

Hiroi said the evacuees first moved to relatives' homes but then chose to use rented housing or hotels to avoid becoming a burden on their relatives over a protracted period.

In interviews with some of the evacuees, a woman in her 20s told the team that immediately after the accident, she voluntarily fled from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to Hokkaido with her 2-year-old child, leaving behind her husband. She later moved to Niigata Prefecture.

Gov't changing line about Kawauchi

July 14, 2014

Govt. delays lifting evacuation order

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140714_26.html

The Japanese government has put off plans to lift the evacuation order for a village near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, after strong opposition from residents who say the area is still not safe.

Government officials planned to lift the order that's in place for part of Kawauchi Village on July 26th, and at a meeting on Sunday they tried to convince residents that they could safely return home.

The officials explained that decontamination work has brought radiation levels in residential areas below a government-set threshold of 20 millisieverts per year, making the environment safe for habitation.

But residents argued that roads and commercial facilities have yet to be restored. They also said a village committee has not made its judgment on radiation levels yet.

After the meeting, Reconstruction Agency official Takashi Kumagai said they will postpone lifting the evacuation order and decide on an appropriate time to end it after further consultations with the village.

An 81-year-old male resident who attended the meeting said the order should be lifted only after the safety of both farming land and residential properties can be guaranteed.

Another man said he is not ready to return yet because he thinks radiation levels are still high.

But some residents want the order to be lifted as soon as possible. An 85-year old woman said she wants to return to her home to be close to her ancestors.

Another man in his 80s said he wants to go home because he doesn't like living in cramped temporary housing.

Jul. 14, 2014 - Updated 08:03 UTC

Iwaki: Public pasture reopened

July 14, 2014

First public pasture reopens in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140714_27.html

A public cow pasture in Fukushima Prefecture has reopened after a closure of 2 years due to high radiation levels.

The Iwaki city government reopened part of the Shibayama pasture on Monday.

The city closed the land after radiation levels higher than the government limit were found in grass following the 2011 nuclear accident.

The city says the level fell below the limit in 7 hectares of the 50-hectare land after workers cut down some grass, sowed seeds, and removed surface soil.

The city says Shibayama is the first among public pastures run by 13 local municipalities in Fukushima to reopen.

Four farmers brought 10 cows on Monday. One of them said he had to raise his cows in a shed while the pasture was closed. He added that bringing them to open land makes his job much easier.

The city is charging farmers about 3 dollars a day to use the opened section of the pasture.

An official says the city wants to reopen the entire pasture as soon as possible.

Jul. 14, 2014 - Updated 07:20 UTC

Divided opinion

People divided over restarting reactors

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140716_32.htm



An NHK survey shows that public opinion is divided over the government's policy to allow the restarting of nuclear power plants that pass safety screening by the country's nuclear power regulator.

NHK conducted a telephone survey of about 1,500 people aged 20 or older for 3 days until Sunday. 64 percent responded.

Of the respondents, 21 percent supported the policy, while 41 percent were opposed. 33 percent were undecided.

Jul. 16, 2014 - Updated 09:05 UTC

Plenty enough to be worried about

July 16, 2014

Lack of evacuation destinations poses problem for care facilities near nuclear plants

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140716p2a00m0na012000c.html>

While the government rushes to reactivate nuclear power plants, starting with Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant, evacuation measures have lagged behind and the needs of those most vulnerable to disasters have been neglected, a Mainichi Shimbun survey has indicated.

Hiroyuki Morimitsu, the 58-year-old manager of nursing care facility Togo Home in the Kagoshima Prefecture city of Satsumasendai, where the Sendai plant is located, is at a loss. "I don't even know where to start," he says.

The nursing facility is located near the Sendai River, just 16 kilometers upstream from the Sendai nuclear plant, which stands near the mouth of the river. The plant is set to become the first in Japan to be reactivated, but the nursing facility does not yet have an evacuation plan.

A group home is also operated on the grounds of the facility, and including clients who come in for short-term stays, there are over 70 residents. There had been rumors that care facility managers with close ties to each other were making arrangements to host each other's clients in an emergency, but Morimitsu doesn't know of any such people.

Because some of Morimitsu's elderly clients are bedridden and cannot easily be transported, Morimitsu is keeping open the option of taking refuge inside in the case of an emergency, but has fears of radiation infiltrating the building. Plus, if lifelines are blocked, staff and residents would not be able to stay for long.

"If possible, I'd like to evacuate everyone," Morimitsu says. He has only the local and national governments to fall back on.

According to a Mainichi Shimbun survey, 70 percent of nursing care facilities and 75 percent of hospitals located within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant have not secured evacuation sites.

Considering the various directions in which radiation could spread in a nuclear disaster, it is advised that care facilities and hospitals secure multiple destinations for evacuation. It's also important to ensure that facilities do not overlap in their evacuation sites, and some must cross prefectural borders to find appropriate sites. Hosting facilities, moreover, requires logistical and financial support. Such wide-ranging coordination is a lot for prefectures and municipalities to handle on their own. As one Ehime Prefecture official said, "We've been going around to various facilities and hospitals asking for their help, but it's hard to accomplish much from just that."

Meanwhile, municipalities which said in the Mainichi survey that they've secured evacuation sites for their facilities and hospitals are not without their concerns.

Of the 16 nursing care facilities in Hokkaido, only nine have been able to secure other nursing care facilities as their destination for evacuation. The remaining seven must initially be relocated to hotels or other accommodation facilities, after which the prefecture will coordinate further evacuation.

Likewise, all 51 care facilities in Shimane Prefecture will first be relocated to community centers and other such accommodation facilities, after which prefectural officials will organize further evacuation to a

facility providing care similar to the evacuating facilities themselves. In other words, clients and patients will not necessarily be evacuated directly to facilities matching their needs.

Starting in November of last year, the Kagoshima Prefectural Government stepped up assistance for nursing care facilities and hospitals in creating evacuation plans. It first secured evacuation sites for 360 people in seven care facilities and hospitals within five kilometers of the Sendai plant. Since April, it has secured evacuation sites for 460 people in 10 care facilities and hospitals within five to 10 kilometers of the plant.

Most of the care facilities and hospitals that will be hosting those evacuees are located in the city of Kagoshima, at least 30 kilometers southeast of the nuclear plant. "Finding evacuation sites was possible because the city has many care facilities and hospitals," a Kagoshima Prefecture official says.

However, close to 10,000 people are being cared for at 227 care facilities and hospitals within 10 to 30 kilometers of the plant, and evacuation plans for those institutions have yet to be drawn up.

As nuclear plant heads towards reactivation, disaster evacuees fear repeat of history

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20140716p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Fukushima nuclear disaster evacuees are raising concerns that the "safety myth" that surrounded Japan's nuclear plants before disaster is being revived with the Nuclear Regulation Authority's July 16 approval of safety measures for Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Takeshi Tanabe, 42, who evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, now lives in a government-rented residence in Tokyo. Day after day, he is stunned by Japan's hurried moves to restart its nuclear reactors.

On the day of the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, Tanabe fled with his wife and 2-year-old son to an elementary school near their home with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

He had heard no news of the problems at the nuclear plant, but at the school Tanabe learned that buses would be carrying him and the other evacuees to the city of Tamura, around 40 kilometers to the west.

However, the buses never arrived. The next day around 150 people were loaded onto 15 Self-Defense Forces trucks and evacuated. Only two hours after they left, the building of the nuclear plant's No. 1 reactor exploded.

Everywhere the trucks went, the evacuation shelters were full. Finally, at around 2 a.m. on March 13, a place that could take them was found. The path the trucks had taken as they traveled for over 12 hours coincided with where radioactive material from the plant had spread.

"I want the authorities to think about plant reactivation on the assumption that another accident will occur. If a new 'safety myth' takes hold like before the disaster, it will be hard to have discussions about residents' safety," says Tanabe.

Hiroshi Sugamoto, 73, head of an administrative section in the town of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, who now lives with his wife in Kyoto Prefecture after evacuating, says, "The lessons of Fukushima are being forgotten."

Before the disaster, Sugamoto participated in regular meetings with executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the owner of the Fukushima plant. But whenever he brought up potential problems regarding tsunamis or earthquakes, he says, TEPCO would dismiss them as "impossible," and the company made him believe in the plant's absolute safety.

Sugamoto's father died during the evacuation, and the disaster robbed him of the automobile parts factory he had spent his life building up. He is reluctant to return to Futaba if it becomes the location of a mid-term storage site for radioactively contaminated soil.

"The nuclear plant supported the local economy, but the disaster stole everything," Sugamoto says. "As a condition for reactivating plants, the government should promise to pay for local residents' living expenses in the event of a disaster."

July 16, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Cameras against thieves in Fukushima Pref.

July 16, 2014

Fukushima towns use cameras to halt surge in thefts at evacuees' homes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407160050>

Authorities in Fukushima Prefecture are installing security cameras to deter and catch unscrupulous thieves targeting homes left vacant by residents who fled after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Thefts and break-ins in evacuated localities around the nuclear plant have become so rampant that at least town has been forced to beef up security using money intended to rebuild the community.

“(The crimes) are like pouring salt into the wounds of the disaster victims,” said Tsutomu Hirayama, a 47-year-old resident from Tomioka in the prefecture.

Hirayama, who volunteers his time to help other evacuees clean up their houses, said about 70 percent of the homes he has visited have fallen victim to thieves.

The town of Namie in Fukushima Prefecture in February installed a camera on a support pillar of a utility pole to record the license plate numbers of vehicles entering and leaving the area. The town installed cameras at seven other locations.

The measure was taken to deter not only thieves but also to prevent motorists from breaking through a barricade to satisfy their curiosity about what was happening in the town, according to a Namie official.

Police use such cameras at arterial roads across the nation, but the installation by a local government is rare.

The towns of Okuma and Futaba, co-hosts of the Fukushima nuclear plant, the town of Tomioka and the village of Katsurao are taking similar measures. They all have districts located within 20 kilometers of the nuclear plant.

All residents remain evacuated from these localities due to high radiation levels caused by the nuclear disaster that unfolded in March 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The five localities reported a combined 212 thefts in 2013. The figure included 192 break-ins, more than fourfold the number in 2010.

As of June, police had reported 107 theft cases in these localities this year.

Authorities say the actual number of crimes is likely much larger because some evacuees cannot confirm the situation at their homes.

Theft cases in the affected areas are expected to rise further after the central government lifts the restriction on travel on National Route No. 6, which runs along the coastal area of Fukushima Prefecture.

The anticipated rise in traffic on the route prompted local governments to introduce the cameras. Okuma will put up surveillance cameras at 40 locations, including the town's center and key roads, and automatic number plate recognition cameras at 18 sites by year-end.

A security company will manage the cameras and dispatch security guards if suspicious individuals are detected. Police will be notified if a vehicle enters the town without an authorized pass.

The Okuma town government earmarked about 725 million yen (\$7.14 million) for the current fiscal year for the security measure. The money will come from national coffers intended to revitalize local economies hard hit by the 2011 triple disaster.

"The town cannot assign people to monitor traffic in the town because of the high radiation levels there," an Okuma official said. "We hope to deter thefts with the installation of the cameras. Potential perpetrators may be discouraged if cameras are in use."

Tomioka will start operating surveillance cameras and automatic number plate recognition cameras at 44 locations as early as in August.

Katsurao plans to install surveillance cameras at 11 sites by the end of this year. Futaba is also preparing to introduce the devices by that time.

After the magnitude-9.0 quake and tsunami devastated coastal areas of the Tohoku region, sympathy, donations and volunteers poured in from around Japan and the globe.

But communities that remain deserted because of the nuclear accident are being increasingly targeted by thieves.

A 34-year-old construction worker from Tamura, also in Fukushima Prefecture, admitted during his trial on July 15 that he stole clothes and other items worth about 32,000 yen during break-ins at two apartments in Tomioka in April.

The haul was apparently just the tip of the iceberg.

“Nobody lived there, so it was easy to steal,” police quoted the suspect as saying during the investigation. “I committed thefts more than 100 times.”

Police confiscated about 3,000 articles, including jewelry, wrist watches and personal computers, at his home.

Hirayama from Tomioka said he welcomes the measures to prevent such appalling crimes.

“The introduction of cameras is a good step, but videos and data should be managed together by the local governments, not separately, to improve efficiency,” he said.

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi and Naoyuki Takahashi.)

Ex-Tomioka mayor dies

July 21, 2014

Ex-Fukushima town mayor dies at 74

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140721p2g00m0dm050000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Katsuya Endo, the former mayor of Tomioka in northeastern Japan who was forced to evacuate the town along with his fellow residents following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, died of gum cancer on Sunday, his family said. He was 74.

Endo served as mayor of the Fukushima Prefecture town for a total of 16 years over four four-year terms between 1997 and 2013. He lost his re-election bid last year.

After a powerful earthquake and tsunami crippled Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi power plant north of the town, all Tomioka residents were forced to evacuate their seaside town. Town hall operations were also moved.

Endo was living in Koriyama, an inland Fukushima city west of Tomioka, when he died at a hospital there.

Tomioka plays host to Tokyo Electric's Fukushima Daini nuclear power plant, which remains offline following the disaster at the nuclear complex nearby.

Reopening the beach in Miyagi

July 20, 2014

Cheers of joy resound at Miyagi beach for first time in 4 years

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201407200011>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

SHIOGAMA, Miyagi Prefecture--Squeals of delight and the happy splashing of feet in the waves were heard on Katsurashima island's bathing beach on July 19, as it opened to public for the first time in four years.

A 100-meter stretch of the 700-meter-long beach was opened after the government of this city and a group of volunteers removed masses of debris washed ashore from the tsunami triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

About 50 people attended a ceremony to mark the reopening of the beach on the morning of July 19, including volunteers from Yamagata University.

"I am hoping that the local community will regain its vitality with the reopening of the beach," said Kumezo Utsumi, the 73-year-old head of the Katsurashima district.

Katsurashima is one of a group of islands called the Urato chain in the city.

Although additional beaches are scheduled to open in Miyagi Prefecture this summer, more than 20 will remain closed this year due to the rubble still waiting to be cleared.

Meanwhile, Umi no Ichi (fish market), a seaside tourist attraction in Kesenuma in the prefecture, resumed full operations on July 19, with 12 shops and restaurants there reopening following the Shark Museum.

It was the first time the facility has returned to normal operations since the quake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, forced its closure.

Visitors howled with joy as they watched a 90-kilogram tuna landed at Kesenuma port being prepared for sale.

Miyagi Prefecture is among the three prefectures along with Iwate and Fukushima on the northeastern coast most affected by the quake and tsunami.

litate group planning to file for registration

July 22, 2014

litate residents to file for arbitration

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140722_28.html

A group of residents from a village near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is planning to **file for state arbitration so all villagers can be entitled to equal damages regardless of radiation levels of their areas.**

The entire village of litate is designated for evacuation, but it is categorized into three different zones, each with a different radiation level and differing amounts of compensation.

The residents from the two zones with relatively low contamination say that the difference in compensation is dividing residents.

They plan to ask the Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims to urge the plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company to pay them equal damages.

The residents also plan to seek the payment of consolation money worth about 30-thousand dollars per person. They say they were exposed to more radiation because the evacuation order wasn't issued until

more than one month after the meltdown.

About 2,500 people, or 40 percent of all Iitate residents, are expected to join the group. The group hopes to invite more people to take part and file for arbitration in autumn.

The leader of the group, Kenichi Hasegawa, says he hopes residents will unite to express their anger.

Jul. 22, 2014 - Updated 08:27 UTC

One way of using Fukushima organic rice

July 22, 2014

Fukushima rice finds a home in Kumamoto shochu

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201407220006>

By MIKA OMURA/ Senior Staff Writer

The owner of a ramen shop in central Kyushu believes he has just the right elixir for those who are shunning produce grown in southern Tohoku as a result of the nuclear disaster there: Kumamoto shochu made with Fukushima rice.

Kyosuke Yoshimura, owner of the shop in Kumamoto city, has set up a nonprofit organization to coordinate the project of brewing shochu spirits made from organically grown rice from the faraway, disaster-hit region that was finding few customers due to the stigma of the nuclear accident.

Yoshimura's interest in Fukushima rice goes back to January 2012 after he purchased organic grain grown on the Watanabe farm in Kitakata, Fukushima Prefecture. He had read a newspaper article about the difficulties the farm faced in the aftermath of the accident that unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant the year before, even though it was located about 100 kilometers from the stricken facility.

The rice was different from any Yoshimura had eaten before.

"It is such a waste that rice like this cannot sell," he thought at the time.

He tried various efforts to generate interest in the rice, such as purchasing it directly from Fukushima and selling it in Kumamoto or offering it along with curry at his restaurant. However, those efforts only consumed a small amount of rice.

That was when Yoshimura came up with the idea of using the rice to brew shochu, which is popular locally

.
Last year, he set up the nonprofit Carrot Kumamoto with a friend to provide assistance to the Tohoku region.

After a ton of rice was purchased, in November 2013, the brewer Yamatoichi Shuzomoto in Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto Prefecture, began making the shochu for the NPO. Hot spring water was used to produce a shochu with a sweet, mild taste.

"It came out very clean because the high-quality rice had few impurities," said Fumihito Shimoda, the president of Yamatoichi Shuzomoto.

The shochu was named "Kagayaki" (shine) with the hope that it will bring brighter times to Fukushima.

By the end of April, some 2,500 bottles, each containing 720 milliliters of shochu, had been produced. The label also displays the close ties between Fukushima and Kumamoto prefectures.

Featured are "Kumamon," the popular bear-like mascot for Kumamoto Prefecture, and "Kibitan," the mascot for the rebuilding of Fukushima Prefecture. Also, on the bottle, there is a short slogan that reads "Using Fukushima rice with Kumamoto technique."

Yoshino Watanabe, 58, and her husband, Jinki, 60, grow rice organically on their 8.5-hectare farm.

"We were perplexed at first by Yoshimura's proposal because we always wanted our customers to eat our rice with their meals," Yoshino Watanabe said.

However, the couple eventually agreed to the shochu idea.

"We hope people who try the drink will remember Fukushima as well as ponder a society where there are no nuclear power plants," she said.

In the fourth summer after the Fukushima nuclear accident, Watanabe farm has seen an increase in individual customers, but there has been no recovery in sales through retailing networks.

Yoshimura began his volunteer work for Fukushima because he believes Kyushu could find itself in the same situation.

"An accident that people said would never occur happened in Fukushima," he said. "Kyushu also has nuclear power plants. To be honest, I sometimes think, this could happen to us tomorrow."

Yoshimura's NPO is now seeking out supporters for the project. A bottle of shochu will be sent to anyone who contributes 2,000 yen (\$20). The money collected will be used to provide assistance to the Fukushima Organic Agriculture Network, another nonprofit organization.

A volunteer group in Fukuoka, Yume Circle, has also pitched in. The group has held fairs in Fukuoka city selling produce grown in the disaster-stricken areas.

The group's leader, Keisuke Yoshimizu, 58, said, "We want to spread the feeling that people are involving themselves, through building a relationship where we have face-to-face contact."

The workings of the ADR system

July 24, 2014

News Navigator: What is the alternative dispute resolution for Fukushima disaster?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140724p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Mainichi answers some common questions readers may have about the "alternative dispute resolution (ADR)" system for victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Question: How does the ADR work for nuclear crisis victims?

Answer: ADR was established in August 2011 for victims of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster as an out-of-court settlement system for cases where the victims and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) could not reach an agreement on the amount of compensation.

Q: Why was such a system established?

A: When disputes cannot be resolved between concerned parties, they usually bring their cases to court. However, the parties would have to pay for their lawyers, and trials take time. For cases stemming from the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster, simple ways to resolve conflicts between the victims and TEPCO were necessary as the number of affected people was large.

The ADR system has been adopted in different fields to settle cases such as medical mistakes and automobile accidents. Trials can take several years until courts reach a ruling, but Fukushima nuclear disaster cases dealt under the ADR system have reached settlements in about six months on average. There is no fee for victims to bring their cases to the ADR.

Q: How do victims use the ADR system?

A: They first put forward their case to the government-backed Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center with evidence for their claim. The center then assigns staff with lawyer qualifications to deal with the case. These lawyers manage evidence submitted by the victims as well as TEPCO and prepare proposals for settlements.

Q: Have all the cases in the ADR system for nuclear disaster reached agreement?

A: No. For example, the nuclear dispute resolution center has closed over 30 cases brought by TEPCO employees and their families without settlement because the plant operator refused the settlement proposals. Some of these victims have brought their cases to courts.

In addition, TEPCO has refused to pay compensation for some 15,000 victims in the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, after the center presented settlement proposals in favor of the victims. Mediators from the center have been trying to persuade TEPCO into agreeing with the settlement.

Meanwhile, some criticize that the center is trying to settle cases quickly by making settlement proposals that are beneficial to TEPCO. In cases of the victims' death during evacuation, for example, the company sets the causal relationship between these deaths and the nuclear disaster at 50 percent in nearly every instance, and has accordingly cut the proposed compensation amount to below 9 million yen, far less than what the victims had asked for.

It is problematic that the government-backed organization has not revealed its operational measures, and experts have urged the center to disclose its yardstick and calculation methods in finalizing the amount of compensation. (Answers by Hiroyuki Takashima, Tokyo City News Department)
July 24, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

The ghosts of Fukushima in Namie

June 18, 2014



The ghosts of Fukushima in Namie

http://all-that-is-interesting.com/ghosts-fukushima-namie-japan?utm_source=outbrainpaid&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=outpaidusukca2

What happened to the "blessings of the mountains"?

July 24, 2014

COMMENTARY: Radioactive pollution endangers cultures of Tohoku mountain communities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201407240005>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

ICHINOSEKI, Iwate Prefecture--Residents of the Higashiyama district, some 15 kilometers east of the center of this northeastern city, used to go into the mountains to gather wild plants to serve on their tables following the spring thaw.

Each household had its own seasoning, and people even took pride in the flavor of their own pickles. They went after mushrooms in autumn. A culture of Japan, handed down from the days of yore, was quite active in this mountainous community, located near the southernmost end of Iwate Prefecture.

Higashiyama is home to the Geibikei valley, designated a “place of scenic beauty” by the central government, where the Satetsugawa river has cut deep into the limestone in the earth and leaves shine a glorious red in autumn.

Residents used to pick wild plants and mushrooms “for fun.” But a group of people in the community is now trying to grow mountain plants on farms.

The group, which calls itself an “association for the preservation of Michinoku (northeastern Japan) culinary culture,” last year planted Japanese angelica, bracken and “koshiabura” plant on fallow farmland on subsidies obtained from the city government. Harvests are envisaged in the spring of 2016.

The group is the brainchild of Makoto Maeda, the 64-year-old president of a cooperative in Higashiyama, which operates a “Kisetsukan” fresh-from-the-farm outlet outside JR Shibajuku Station.

Wild plants and mushrooms picked by local residents used to fill Kisetsukan’s shelves, along with cakes made of locally produced rice, vegetables and other ingredients.

But things have never been the same since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Rain sometimes coincided with southerly winds arriving from the direction of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which continued spewing large amounts of radioactive substances from mid- to late March of that year. Afterward, the mountains of Ichinoseki were no longer what they used to be.

'BLESSINGS OF THE MOUNTAINS'

Japanese angelica, bracken, royal fern, bamboo shoots--these "blessings of the mountains" in succession came under shipment bans and voluntarily shipment restraints after radioactive substances were detected in them.

This spring, Kisetsukan only had a meager lineup of products that are not covered by shipment restrictions, such as butterbur, wasabi leaves and "shidoke" plants.

It takes 30 years for radioactive cesium-137, which polluted the mountains, to lose half its mass. If nothing is done to change the situation, that could endanger an entire culture, of which blessings of the mountains have always been a part.

That led Maeda to come up with the idea of growing mountain plants on clean ground so they are safe to eat.

"We can take back our culture as long as we keep eating what we have always eaten," Maeda said. "We will one day be going into the mountains again to gather wild plants and mushrooms."

But easier said than done.

Ichinoseki had 76 fresh-from-the-farm outlets, such as Kisetsukan, before the Fukushima nuclear disaster, but 14 of these have since gone out of business.

"Smaller outlets, where elderly men and women used to sell wild plants and mushrooms of their own picking, have nothing any longer to sell and are being driven out of operations," said Jun Yanada, a forestry official with the city government. "The situation is so awful."

One industry received a crushing blow--the culturing of shiitake mushrooms on oak tree logs. Iwate Prefecture formerly was a major producer of log-grown shiitake.

It boasted an output of 201 tons in dried shiitake and 385 tons in raw shiitake in 2010, but both figures plummeted to less than half in 2012, partly because most of the mushrooms used to be grown outdoors under natural environments and partly because radioactive contamination rendered substrate tree logs unusable.

Grains, vegetables, mushrooms and other food products are banned from shipments when their radioactive cesium levels exceed 100 becquerels per kilogram.

But substrate tree logs are banned from use at half that threshold, or 50 becquerels per kg, because cesium levels in shiitake mushrooms rise to double the levels in their substrates.

“Blessings of the mountains have smart ways to collect and amass rare natural nutrients,” said Toru Kikuchi, a forestry official with the Iwate prefectural government. “That is precisely why they represented ‘blessings.’ ”

But that blessing backfired.

Growing shiitake mushrooms on tree logs is laborious. Harvest comes only at the end of two summers after the logs are inoculated with spawn in winter. Even if the cultures were to be restarted next winter, there would be no harvest before the autumn of 2016.

More than 70 percent of log-grown shiitake mushroom producers told a survey by the Ichinoseki city government that they did not want to restart their cultures.

More than three years from the start of the nuclear crisis, shipment bans and voluntary shipment restrictions continue to affect wild plants and mushrooms in 15 prefectures.

The number of log-grown shiitake mushroom producers has plummeted to less than one-fifth and less than one-third the pre-disaster levels, respectively, in Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures.

'SATOYAMA' CULTURE AT RISK

Fukushima Prefecture, a major producer of “konara” oak trees, has provided mushroom substrate logs to all parts of Japan. From generation to generation, Fukushima people have taken care of konara trees in their “satoyama,” or biologically diverse border areas that surround human habitats.

But the nuclear disaster rendered many of the logs unshippable. The output of substrate tree logs now stands at only 6 percent of pre-disaster levels.

Lost sales of trees will mean fewer opportunities to take care of them. A satoyama culture, which people have long preserved, is on the brink of collapsing.

The prefectural government plans to study how far radioactive levels will have reduced when new shoots from the stumps of konara trees cut down have again grown into trees. It takes 20-30 years for new shoots to grow large enough to serve as mushroom substrates.

The time scale is mind-boggling, but nobody can afford to just be idly looking on, said Masaaki Watabe, a forestry official with the Fukushima prefectural government.

"I have nothing to say/ In the face of hometown mountains/ So gratifying/ Are my hometown mountains"--so goes a famous short poem by Takuboku Ishikawa (1886-1912), a native of Iwate Prefecture.

The mountains have always been part of people's lives. When will things return to the way they used to be?

* * *

Invisible evacuees?

July 30, 2014

Saitama was unaware of 2,400 Fukushima evacuees living in prefecture

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140730p2a00m0na005000c.html>

SAITAMA -- The prefectural government here was unaware of about 2,400 people taking shelter in the region after evacuating from Fukushima Prefecture following the nuclear crisis, it has been learned.

The Saitama Prefectural Government found out about the omission after asking all municipalities in the prefecture earlier in July about the number of evacuees they host from the nuclear disaster. The prefectural government had previously tallied the number of only those who lived in temporary housing units it and some municipalities under its jurisdiction provides free of charge. It regularly asked only some of the local bodies about the number of evacuees.

The Reconstruction Agency tasked with efforts to help areas hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the ensuing nuclear crisis recover from the disasters said it will urge other prefectural governments to release all available figures.

The prefectural government's fire and disaster management division asked all the 63 municipalities in the prefecture on July 8 about the number of evacuees they host. After tallying the figures, the prefectural government revised upward the number of evacuees from 2,640 as of June to 5,044.

Of them, the prefectural government reported 2,992 evacuees, including those who it newly confirmed were living in public housing, to the Reconstruction Agency as a provisional figure.

About 2,400 evacuees who have been newly confirmed are mostly those who have voluntarily evacuated to the prefecture following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. The figure is expected to further increase, and many unconfirmed evacuees may not receive administrative information such as on healthcare and education and measures to support evacuees.

The prefectural government had previously tallied only evacuees living at temporary housing units it and more than 20 municipalities under its jurisdiction provides for evacuees. It sent an email with a list of the number of evacuees attached to these local bodies and asked the municipalities to report any change in their figures.

This is attributable to the fact that the national government has failed to define evacuees from the nuclear disaster or show any specific method of tallying evacuees.

Yohei Shibusawa, head of the division, told the Mainichi, "We stuck to hard figures (of those living at public temporary housing units)."

A citizens organization supporting evacuees taking shelter in Saitama Prefecture conducted a survey on all 63 municipalities in the prefecture in 2013 and 2014 and found that 1.7 times to two times more evacuees were living in the prefecture than prefectural authorities had announced. The group then pointed out that the prefectural government had failed to grasp the number of evacuees it hosts.

The Reconstruction Agency has announced the number of evacuees across the country every month based on figures provided by prefectural governments. As of July 10, the agency put the number at 247,233 throughout the nation.

July 30, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

The ordeal of visually-impaired people

July 24, 2014

Visually impaired struggle with life in post-tsunami towns

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201407240065>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAMAISHI, Iwate Prefecture--Visually impaired people in areas affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster are becoming increasingly reluctant to leave their homes as they face sidewalks still in ruin, a changing townscape and a lack of support groups.

Early in the morning of July 12, as tsunami alerts blared across the Pacific coast of northeastern Honshu, Ryo Nakamura, a 61-year-old acupuncturist and moxibutionist living near the city's port, evacuated with his 58-year-old sister Mimiko to a hospital nearby.

But with Nakamura being blind and Mimiko also being visually impaired, they had to rely on Masakatsu Tokiwa, a 69-year-old sighted guide who supports people with visual disabilities.

"It was impossible for us to evacuate by ourselves, so (Tokiwa) coming for us in a car was very helpful," Nakamura said.

Though it has been more than three years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the edges of sidewalks and alleyways are still wrecked from the tsunami that followed the turmoil. Sidewalks remain bumpy, and many of the tactile pavings that are meant to signal the visually impaired have either been damaged or obscured with dirt and debris.

To make things even more difficult, numerous new buildings are now being erected as the region attempts to reconstruct.

"I used to determine the position of a nearby car by listening to how its sound reflected off a building's wall as it went by," said Nakamura. "But now, the sounds are changing rapidly. The noise of construction going on everywhere confuses me even more."

Immediately after the earthquake, a support group from outside the prefecture set up a branch in the city, assisting residents on their trips between their homes and the hospital or shops. But the group withdrew from the city last autumn.

Currently, Nakamura is assisted by Tokiwa, who belongs to the nonprofit organization Kobe Eyelight Association, but the service is scheduled to end in September.

"These people need the most support starting now, when the town is changing shape," Tokiwa said. Tokiwa, a survivor of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, currently assists about 30 people living in the Kamaishi area.

As of late March, approximately 4,700 certified people with disabilities resided in the 27 cities, towns and villages struck by the earthquake in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

Today, nonprofit organizations established locally have taken over the various groups that initially supported the disabled after the disaster. However, most of these organizations are far too busy during the day caring for the basic daily needs of people with disabilities and have no time to take any of them out shopping or to a hospital.

"The visually impaired, who already had enough trouble going out (before the disaster), are finding it even harder to leave their homes since the earthquake," an official of the Japan Federation of the Blind said. "We are worried whether or not there are enough hands to assist their daily trips. The establishment of a system to assist those in need locally, as well as giving support from other regions, is crucial."

(This article was written by Masataka Yamaura and Masakazu Higashino.)

Paris Opera ballet dancers stop by in Fukushima

July 27, 2014

Fukushima ballet students get a lift from top dancers from Paris

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407270023>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Ballet students in Fukushima Prefecture received world-class instruction and encouragement on July 26 as top dancers from the internationally renowned Paris Opera Ballet stopped by to give lessons.

The accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant three years ago led to a drop in the number of students at one ballet school the Paris dancers appeared at.

However, the top dancers, including étoile Dorothee Gilbert, told the students who had gathered at the Hitomi Takeuchi Ballet School to keep looking forward because difficulties could be overcome as long as they maintained their passion for ballet.

Cheers arose from the 30 or so students who had come for the lesson as the Paris dancers appeared at the ballet school in Fukushima city at 3 p.m. The students carefully scrutinized the movements of world-class dancers they likely never dreamed of meeting or seeing up close.

"I learned the importance of perfecting each and every pose," said Mayu Sakai, 18, who plans to study at a ballet school in Chicago from September. "I want to become a ballerina who can perform anywhere in the world."

Another participant at the July 26 lesson was Rio Sato, 16, who had returned to Japan temporarily from Britain where she is studying at the Royal Ballet School in London. Sato had to give up competing in an international competition that was held in the United States because of the March 11, 2011, natural disasters. However, the Royal Ballet School allowed her to enroll because her skills were evaluated highly.

"Top dancers can make people happy simply by being there," Sato said. "I want to make my ballet more beautiful and skillful."

The Hitomi Takeuchi Ballet School had about 200 students practicing at three locations before the Fukushima nuclear accident. However, about 40 students had to give up ballet after they were forced to evacuate.

Even those who continued to practice at the school had to take extra precautions amid the aftershocks that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake. Clothes and valuables were kept near the entrance to the practice room so students could grab their belongings and flee quickly in the event of a strong tremor.

The special ballet lessons were organized by the French Embassy in Tokyo. This was the second set of lessons following those held in Sendai and Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture in 2012.

Two ballet schools in Fukushima city were chosen this time to provide an opportunity for children who were impacted by the Fukushima nuclear accident. The special tutelage will also be held in Sendai and Ishinomaki on July 27.

Govt & subsidies for Fukushima

July 30, 2014

Govt. subsidies for Fukushima questioned

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140730_13.html

Jul. 30, 2014 - Updated 05:15 UTC+2

There is more controversy over dealing with the aftermath of the 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

NHK has learned the government notified the prefecture of a plan to provide a subsidy of more than 2.2 billion dollars, over 30 years for regional development. The pledge is connected with the construction of temporary storage facilities for highly radioactive waste.

Sources say the central government last week conveyed its idea to the Fukushima prefectural government and others.

The central government had been discussing with local municipalities a plan to purchase the land needed to build temporary storage facilities for radioactive debris.

The arrangement calls for the facilities to be built in the towns of Futaba and Okuma, which host the Daiichi plant.

Sources also say the government at the same time indicated that it would stop paying subsidies for the Fukushima Daini nuclear plant. Local people are calling for it to be decommissioned. The Daini plant, located 10 kilometers south of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi, has been offline since the 2011 disaster.

The government's new plan would reduce the annual subsidies total for Fukushima by nearly 40 million dollars.

The Fukushima prefectural government has reacted sharply. Local officials are complaining of the new burden of the temporary storage facilities.

Proposals to clear up no-entry zones

July 31, 2014

Coalition parties form recovery proposals

Jul. 31, 2014 - Updated 21:55 UTC+2

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Members of parties in Japan's ruling coalition want the government to do more to get people from no-entry zones around the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant back to their homes within 5 years.

They have a new set of proposals on clearing up problems in the zones. The package is the fourth by a working group of the main governing Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner New Komeito.

The documents say it is important for the central government to take the initiative in bringing Fukushima Prefecture back from the 2011 nuclear accident.

The legislators urge the central government to quickly and steadily decommission reactors at the Fukushima plant and dispose of radioactive water at the site.

They also demand speedy decontamination of areas around the plant and swift establishment of intermediate facilities to store radioactive soil and other contaminated material.

The lawmakers referred to the no-go zones of relatively high radiation levels. They call for the central, prefectural, and municipal authorities to cooperate to create a restoration plan and intensively proceed with decontamination efforts.

They say the authorities should work to allow evacuees from no-entry zones to return home within 5 years and resume their lives there.

The lawmakers also propose a quick study of joint rescue and recovery drills by personnel from the Self-Defense Forces, coast guard, police, and firefighters under an envisioned emergency situations agency.

They say the exercises are necessary to implement appropriate initial responses to disasters as serious as the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Both parties plan to submit the new proposals to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the near future.

First shipment of fresh strawberries from Iitate

August 1, 2014

Fukushima farm ships 1st produce cultivated in evacuation zone

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201408010041

By YUKIKO SEINO/ Staff Writer

IITATE, Fukushima Prefecture--Forty kilograms of fresh strawberries were shipped from Iitate Ichigo Land farm on July 31, the first produce dispatched from an area designated as an evacuation zone since the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"The fruit has a nice, sweet aroma," said Hiroshi Sato, 62, who runs Iitate Ichigo Land farm with his wife, Yoko. "We can ship the produce with confidence."

The Raiho strawberries were cultivated in a greenhouse. Tests conducted by the Fukushima prefectural government did not detect any radioactive material in the fruit.

The first batch of strawberries is expected to be purchased by a produce wholesaler in Nagoya. All the residents of Iitate were forced to evacuate after the onset of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The greenhouse is in a locale that has been designated as an area where preparations are under way to lift the evacuation order. Decontamination work in the area has already been completed.

Sato began growing the strawberries last year from seedlings. He has been commuting to the greenhouse from his apartment in Fukushima city, where he has evacuated to.

"I was unsure if I should resume farming while all the residents are still evacuated," Sato said. "But in the end, I thought that something had to be started."

The climate of Iitate is ideal for growing strawberries because of the difference in temperatures between night and day.

Sato hopes his decision to resume farming will be a catalyst for further rebuilding, even though he is aware that some people said farming would never be possible in Iitate.

Before resuming operations, Sato replaced the vinyl used in the greenhouse and also replaced the soil used in the cultivating shelves.

Although there were no problems involving radioactive materials in the soil and water, Sato said he thought about the possible reaction among consumers.

The prefectural government required only one test for radioactive materials, but Sato also had tests conducted by the village government as well as a private-sector company.

"Although I do have concerns about negative publicity, I want to proceed with a positive attitude," Sato said.

Before the nuclear accident, orders for Sato's Raiho strawberries came from bakeries as far as Shikoku and Kyushu. Sato's oldest son and daughter-in-law used to help tend the strawberries, but post-3/11 it is just Sato and his wife who are working the farm, which is one-fourth its pre-disaster size.

Fukushima peaches

August 5, 2014

Fukushima Pref. promotes peaches in Bangkok

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140805_03.html

Asia

Aug. 5, 2014 - Updated 01:14 UTC+2

Officials from the Fukushima prefectural government and other organizations have joined forces to promote peaches at a department store in Bangkok, Thailand.

At **around 9 dollars a piece**, the fruit is about 3 times the price it is in Japan. But many people bought some after trying a sample.

One woman said the fruit smelled good and was very sweet. She said her mother also liked it very much.

Peach exports from Fukushima to Thailand were halted after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in 2011. They restarted in September 2012.

Exports have been on the rise since then, with 1.1 tons in the year ending March 2013 and 1.9 tons in the year ending March 2014.

Fukushima officials say they're targeting wealthy shoppers.

Muneyasu Minakawa from a producers' group said he hopes the peaches make Thai people smile.

Three billion dollars over 30 years

August 8, 2014

Government to provide \$3 bil. for Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140808_15.html

Aug. 8, 2014 - Updated 04:02 UTC+2

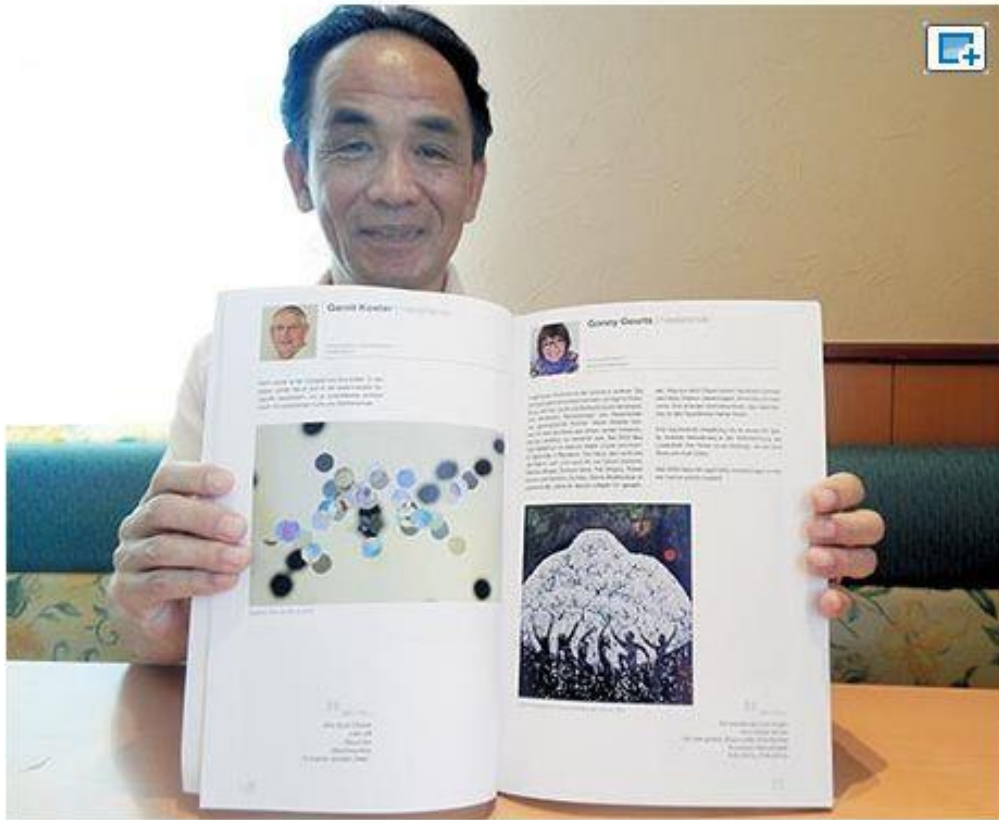
The Japanese government plans to provide a subsidy of about three billion dollars over 30 years for regional development in Fukushima Prefecture. The grant is to be offered when local communities agree to build temporary storage facilities for highly radioactive waste.

Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara and Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto will explain on Friday the grant for the local governments to Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato and the mayors of Futaba and Okuma towns.

The government plans to build facilities in the two towns to store highly radioactive waste generated in the prefecture by the decontamination effort following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster. The two towns host the damaged nuclear plant.

The ministers did not refer to the amount of the subsidy on July 28th when they met the governor and mayors. At the meeting, the ministers told them the government will allow landowners to keep their property rights for the land where it plans to build the facilities. The government had originally planned to buy land for the facilities from the owners.

Fukushima poet Taro Aizu



Fukushima native Taro Aizu displays pages of a book that contain overseas artists' works featuring his poetry. (Kanakano Miyajima)

August 11, 2014

Poems of Fukushima native pluck heartstrings overseas

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201408110066

By KANAKO MIYAJIMA/ Staff Writer

HADANO, Kanagawa Prefecture--Poet Taro Aizu is still trying to adjust to his newfound fame overseas. Aizu is the pen name of the native of Fukushima Prefecture, where the nuclear crisis continues to exert a critical impact on people's lives. His verses that pay homage to Fukushima Prefecture are drawing praise from haiku lovers and other artists around the world.

The 60-year-old resident of Hadano published a collection of poems this spring that lovingly describe his hometown.

Titled "My Fukushima," the privately printed work contains his poems that have been translated into English, French and other languages. Aizu's Facebook page also promotes his works.

Aizu was born in Aizu-Misato, Fukushima Prefecture, and moved to Tokyo after he graduated from high school. He majored in French literature at university.

He has released a succession of works while teaching English at a high school.

The 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster that transformed local scenery and fertile farmland in the prefecture into a waste zone left him feeling something had been ripped from his soul.

Aizu said his heart ached when he visited the cities of Iwaki and Soma, where many homes were swept away by the towering tsunami and debris remains to be cleared because of the nuclear accident triggered by the event.

“It was frustrating as if the hometown in my mind had been destroyed,” he said. “I felt I had to preserve (the scenery of Fukushima) by composing poems based on my feelings for Fukushima.”

Aizu has since been creating haiku and gogyoshi (five-line poetry) featuring common scenes from the four respective seasons in Fukushima Prefecture. He focuses on the rural landscape and people’s feelings for the land they inherited from their ancestors.

“Although (the term Fukushima) is now strongly associated overseas with images of the nuclear crisis, I want to show the true beauty of Fukushima using the power of poetry,” Aizu said.

In January 2012, he began presenting English and French versions of his works on his Facebook account under the title of “My hometown, Fukushima.” His poetry quickly caught the attention of foreign haiku aficionados who translated them into other languages.

One of Aizu’s friends in the Netherlands sent a message praising his works. In the message, the friend said he had never been to Fukushima but was able to imagine beautiful scenery around the time following rice planting when he read Aizu’s poems.

Urged by readers of his poetry, Aizu in March last year released an e-book of his poetry. It was translated into seven languages with the help of friends from Germany, Italy and Spain.

The key poem in the book praises the “takizakura” weeping higan cherry tree in Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture, that is a government-designated natural monument. It is believed to be over 1,000 years old and regarded as one of the three prominent cherry trees of Japan.

In English, the poem goes:

We'll sing a song
And dance again
Around the blossoms
In our hometown,
Fukushima, Fukushima.

The five-line poem was translated into 35 languages, including Mongolian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkish, Arabic, Ukrainian and Russian. All the translated versions of the work are included in the book.

“I felt the desire to enjoy the beauty of flowers of one’s hometown together with his or her family members and friends is universal,” Aizu said. “My poetry has helped people learn the sorrow of Fukushima, where bonds with nature and families are being lost.”

Inspired by Aizu’s poetry, foreign musicians, painters and photographers overseas have created works featuring his works to express their feelings for Fukushima.

Special exhibitions themed on artworks related to Aizu’s poetry have been held in the Netherlands and Germany. Additional exhibits are scheduled to be held in Portugal in October and in France in February next year.

“I did not imagine my works would spread across the world and win people’s sympathy to such an extent,” Aizu said. “I will continue presenting the situation surrounding Fukushima.”

Easing restrictions o Japanese food

August 13, 2014

Gov't steps up calls for Asia countries to ease restrictions on food imports from Japan

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140813p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The government is stepping up its calls for Asian countries to ease or lift restrictions on imports of agricultural, marine and food products from Japan that were imposed in the wake of the outbreak in March 2011 of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Agriculture Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi was to visit Hong Kong on Aug. 13 and call for the relaxing of its restrictions on imports of farm and other products from five prefectures including Fukushima. Hayashi is poised to try to help boost exports of Japanese food products by demonstrating the safety of those products based on scientific data.

Before attending the "Hong Kong Food Expo 2014" due to open on Aug. 14, Hayashi is to hold talks with Hong Kong Secretary for Food and Health Ko Wing-man and urge Hong Kong to relax its ban on imports of foods such as vegetables and fruits from regions affected by the nuclear disaster.

Hong Kong is the world's top destination for Japan's exports of agricultural, marine and food products, with more than 20 percent of Japan's exports of such products arriving in Hong Kong in 2013. And yet, Hong Kong keeps its ban on imports of such products as vegetables and milk from the five prefectures of Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, at least 50 countries and regions imposed restrictions on food imports from Japan immediately after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. The ministry has since been giving explanations based on scientific data that there are no such problems as contamination with radioactive substances.

A senior ministry official said, "There may be a vague feeling of anxiety that is not based on scientific grounds." The government's efforts have borne some fruit. Singapore, for example, eased some of its restrictions in July. Nevertheless, 41 countries and regions still maintain some sort of restrictions.

Japan's exports of agricultural, marine and food products stood at 492 billion yen in 2010 -- before the Great East Japan Earthquake. They dropped to 451.1 billion yen in 2011 and 449.7 billion yen in 2012. But thanks to the weak yen, they rose to a record 550.5 billion yen in 2013.

Boosting exports is a pillar of the government's growth strategy. Thus, the government plans to urge each country to relax or lift their restrictions on imports of agricultural, marine and food products from the regions affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

August 13, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Giant picture of disaster in Sendai

August 16, 2014

Giant watercolor captures devastation of Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408160023>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

SENDAI--A giant image of a destroyed reactor building in a nuclear wasteland is drawing crowds at the Sendai Mediatheque cultural hall in Aoba Ward here.

Titled "Kyodaiga de Egakareru Fukushima" (Fukushima drawn in a huge picture), the watercolor of the Fukushima nuclear disaster by Hiroshige Kagawa is 5.4 meters high and 16.4 meters wide.

Kagawa, 37, is a native of Miyagi Prefecture.

The 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated the prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima.

“I want to provide an opportunity for people in Miyagi Prefecture to think about Fukushima,” said Kagawa, who added that the painting portrays the anger he felt when he visited the vicinity surrounding the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after the onset of the disaster.

Kagawa first began making watercolors on a large scale in 2003.

One of the painter's relatives died in the tsunami. Kagawa said his grandmother could not be located after the tsunami swept through the coastal city of Natori in Miyagi Prefecture. He searched for her by bicycle and she was later found to be safe.

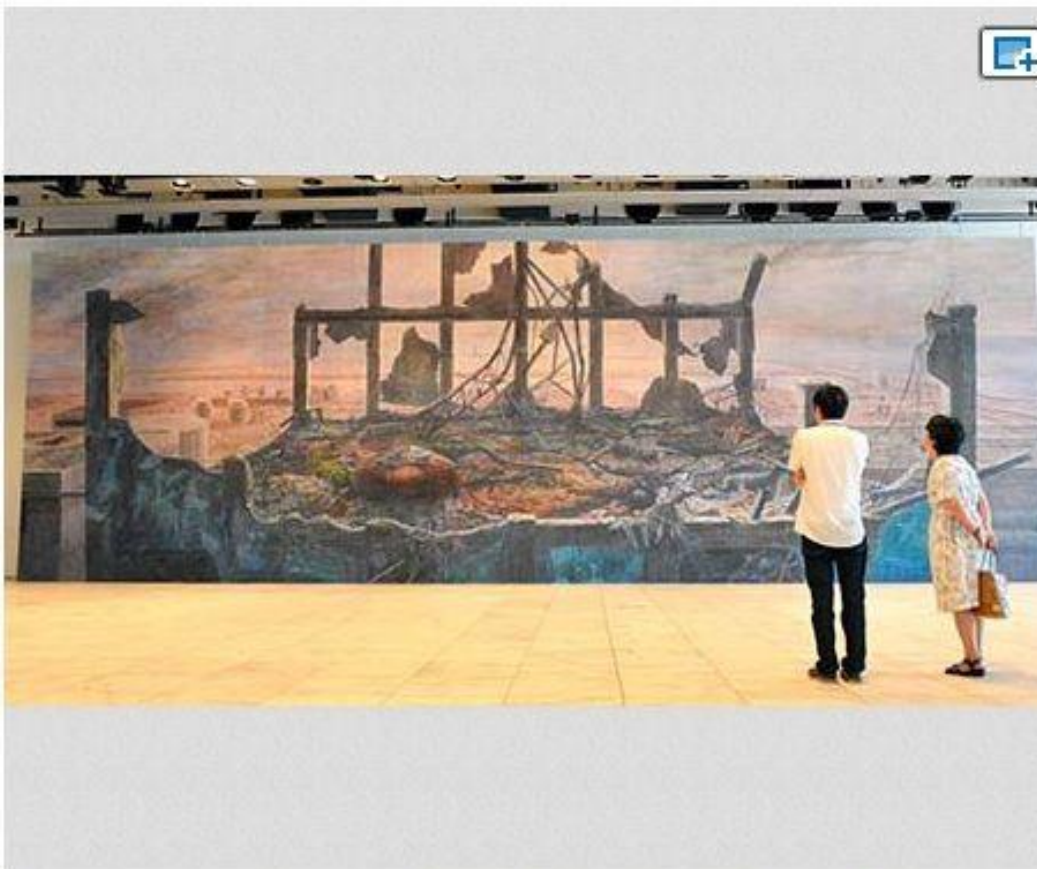
Based on those experiences, he began to paint large watercolor depictions of areas that were damaged by the earthquake and tsunami.

“As an artist from an affected area, I must paint what I feel,” he said.

One of those paintings is “Yuki ni Tsutsumareru Hisaichi” (A disaster-affected area covered with snow).

“By looking back on the disaster through art, we will be able to move forward strongly,” he said during an exhibition of the painting in Sendai in January 2012.

The exhibition of “Kyodaiga de Egakareru Fukushima” at Sendai Mediatheque will run until Aug. 17.



Hiroshige Kagawa's watercolor of the Fukushima nuclear disaster on display at Sendai Mediatheque (Mayu Horie)

Evacuation order lifted in Kawauchi



August 18, 2014

Gov't decides to lift evacuation order on Fukushima village despite residents' protests

Senior Vice Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Kazuyoshi Akaba meets residents in Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, on Aug. 17, 2014. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140818p2a00m0na009000c.html>

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima -- An evacuation order for the eastern part of this village that has been in place since the Fukushima nuclear disaster will be lifted on Oct. 1, government officials agreed on Aug. 17, despite residents protesting that it is too early to lift the order.

The order covers an area with 139 households where 275 people live within 20 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Also on Oct. 1, a stricter evacuation order covering 18 households where 54 people live will be lowered in severity to allow more access.

The agreement was reached by Senior Vice Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Kazuyoshi Akaba and Kawauchi Mayor Yuko Endo. Akaba is also head of the national government's local nuclear disaster-response headquarters.

At a meeting between Akaba and residents after the agreement was made, residents expressed concern about radiation levels and about the end of the emotional duress compensation. These reparations of 100,000 yen a month will end a year after the evacuation order is lifted. In opening remarks, Akaba said to the audience of around 75 local residents, "An evacuation order is a very strong restriction on residents. Now that the conditions (for lifting the evacuation order) have been met, we can no longer continue to violate the constitutionally-guaranteed rights of living and property (by not allowing residents to return)." However, none of the residents at the meeting agreed with Akaba's argument. Over the course of a question and answer session lasting about an hour and a half, residents raised question after question, such as about the safety of food grown in the area. Government officials responded that they had stricter radiation limits in place for this food than in any other country.

Takamistu Kusano, 61, head of an administrative ward in the village, told government officials, "Many people say they cannot come back unless the whole area under evacuation order is returned to how it used to be."

The lifting of an evacuation order will be the second one, following the removal of one in the Miyakoji area in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Tamura in April this year.

The government on July 13 had suggested removing the order on July 26, but withdrew that idea after opposition from residents. This time, the decision to remove the order was made with the agreement of the village mayor after a committee of the municipal government checked the effects of radiation decontamination and advised the mayor that removal of the order was acceptable.

Since April the Kawauchi Municipal Government has allowed long-term stays in the area under evacuation order to aid preparations for residents' return, but as of this August only 55 residents, or 20 percent, were trying to use this system. Due to concerns about radiation and delays in setting up infrastructure, residents' return to the area is expected to be slow.

Second group of Fukushima residents given OK to return home in evacuation zone

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201408180038>

August 18, 2014

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima Prefecture--Some residents of this village who lived within the 20-kilometer restricted zone surrounding the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were told on Aug. 17 that they can soon return home, only the second time the right of return has been granted.

The lifting of the evacuation order will allow the return of 275 residents living in 139 households in the eastern area of the village of Kawauchi.

The government made the announcement during a meeting with residents of the village on Aug. 17.

In the meeting in downtown Kawauchi, Kazuyoshi Akaba, a senior vice industry minister who is also chief of the government's task force handling the Fukushima nuclear disaster, proposed Aug. 26 and Oct. 1 for the dates of lifting the order.

"The evacuation order is forcing people (to stay out of the evacuation zones) despite the Constitution guaranteeing them the right to choose their residence," Akaba said. "If the zones are no longer life-threatening, then we must consider lifting the evacuation orders."

Though many residents opposed it, Mayor Yuko Endo accepted the government's decision.

"Nevertheless, many residents also wish to go back home," he said. "We have no choice but to accept the decision to lift the evacuation order on Oct. 1."

Following the crisis at the nuclear power plant after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the government established three categories of evacuation zones in Fukushima Prefecture. From highest to lowest in intensity of radiation contamination, they are the "difficult-to-return zone," the "no-residence zone" and the "zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order."

In addition to the lifting of the evacuation order, an adjacent area with 54 residents in 18 households will also be upgraded to a zone being prepared for the lifting of the evacuation order from a no-residence zone. It is the first such case where a non-resident zone status will be upgraded.

Residents living in the Miyakoji district of the city of Tamura just north of Kawauchi, in April, were the first in the 20-kilometer restricted zone to be allowed to return to their homes.

Return to Kawauchi

August 18, 2014

Villagers in area near No. 1 plant may get OK to return home on Oct. 1

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/18/national/villagers-in-area-near-no-1-plant-may-get-ok-to-return-home-on-oct-1/#.U_GhamOnq1s

JJI

KAWAUCHI, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – The government said Sunday that it was considering lifting its evacuation advisory on Oct. 1 for the eastern part of the village of Kawauchi, located within 20 km of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The government will formalize the lifting at a meeting of its nuclear disaster response headquarters later this month.

It will be the second district in Fukushima Prefecture where an evacuation advisory has been removed within the former exclusion zone set up after the March 2011 triple meltdown at the plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. The first to see its advisory lifted was Miyakoji district in the city of Tamura. The no-go zone within the 20-km radius of the stricken plant has been redesignated according to estimated levels of radiation.

The government also proposed removing a ban on residency in a more contaminated eastern part of Kawauchi and is expected to advise residents there to prepare for the lifting of the evacuation advisory. At a meeting with local residents, Kazuyoshi Akaba, state minister of economy, trade and industry, put forward two proposals regarding when to remove the evacuation advisory for the less polluted area in eastern Kawauchi.

One is Aug. 26, after the end of a long-stay program that has been implemented in preparation for residents' return to their homes. The other is Oct. 1, following the completion of road repair and other construction work slated for sometime in September.

Some residents opposed the removal of the evacuation advisory, citing concerns over exposure to radiation from the damaged plant. But Mayor Yuko Endo decided to accept the Oct. 1 option, saying the lifting of the advisory does not mean that residents will be forced to return home.

Government representatives presented residents with survey results showing that radiation doses in the eastern part of the village have been reduced as a result of decontamination work. They also reported on progress in the recovery of infrastructure.

The eastern part of Kawauchi was previously within the 20-km exclusion zone. In April 2012, the district was reorganized into an area where residents are allowed to enter during the daytime and a more contaminated area where residency is banned.

After decontamination work ran its course, a long-stay program was launched in the less contaminated area on April 26. In July, the government proposed lifting the evacuation advisory on July 26, but dropped the plan due to opposition from residents.

As of June 1, there were 139 households with 275 people in the less polluted area and 18 households with 54 members in the other area.

Fukushima village OKs lifting of evacuation order

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140818_14.html

Aug. 18, 2014 - Updated 04:36 UTC+2

A village near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has approved a proposal by the central government to lift an evacuation order for part of it on October 1st.

About 80 residents of Kawauchi Village in Fukushima Prefecture attended a meeting held by the central government on Sunday.

It was reported at the meeting that a committee set up by the village decided that it was indeed appropriate to lift the evacuation order.

Government officials then proposed that the order be lifted following the start of additional decontamination work in September in areas where radiation levels remain high.

They also said work to repair main roads is expected to be completed in the same month.

Village mayor Yuko Endo accepted the proposal, saying that after it takes place, villagers will be free to decide whether or not to return home. He said it will enable villagers to go back to the lives they had before the nuclear accident.

The government initially proposed lifting the evacuation order on July 26th. But it postponed the plan due to strong opposition from local residents.

Some participants at Sunday's meeting expressed opposition again, mainly due to concerns over radiation.

A 53-year-old man said it is too early to lift the order, as radiation readings remain high in some areas and many issues remain unresolved.

A 66-year-old man said he wants the order to be lifted as soon as possible, as the government says it is ready to compensate residents and rebuild the village's infrastructure.

Kawauchi Village will be the second area to have an evacuation order lifted. In April, the government lifted the order for the Miyakoji district in Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture.

Export of Fukushima rice to Singapore resumes

August 19, 2014

Fukushima exports first batch of rice since meltdowns to Singapore

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/19/business/first-export-fukushima-rice-since-nuclear-crisis-started-2011-reaches-singapore/#.U_M2Y20nq1s

Kyodo

Exports of Fukushima-grown rice have resumed after being suspended by the nuclear crisis in March 2011 amid soaring concerns about radiation contamination, a national agricultural cooperative said Monday.

A shipment of 300 kg of Koshihikari brand rice produced in Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture, has arrived in Singapore to be sold at a supermarket Friday after clearing customs, according to the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations.

Fukushima Prefecture was a major producer of rice and had exported some 100 tons to Hong Kong and similar areas before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 atomic plant.

No rice produced in Fukushima was ever exported after the core meltdowns, the cooperative said. This year's exports of agricultural and marine products were valued at ¥284 billion from January to June, up 10.3 percent from a year ago, buoyed by growing popularity of Japanese cuisine. But exports from Fukushima have stayed sluggish amid persistent concern about radioactive contamination from the meltdown-stricken Fukushima No. 1 complex, which was recently linked to rice contamination elsewhere in the prefecture reportedly caused by cleanup efforts at the plant that kicked radiation-tainted dust into the air.

A number of countries and regions still impose restrictions on farm products from the prefecture. Singapore had banned imports of some foods from Fukushima but lifted it in May.

See also :

Fukushima rice exports to resume

Aug. 18, 2014 - Updated 02:18 UTC+2

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140818_13.html

Farmers in Japan's Fukushima prefecture are resuming rice exports to Singapore this month.

This will mark the first overseas shipment of their grain since the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The accident raised concerns about the safety of goods produced in the area. Local farmers had to suspend their annual exports of more than 100 tons of rice to Hong Kong, Taiwan and other places.

Japan's federation of agricultural cooperatives, known as JA Zen-Noh, has been negotiating with other countries to start accepting Fukushima rice again. The group succeeded in convincing Singaporean officials of the product's safety.

The initial export of 300 kilograms will be rigorously screened for radioactive materials before shipment. Customers in Singapore will be able to buy the rice starting this Friday.

Fukushima farmers have already restarted exports of other products like peaches and apples. Prefectural and Japan Agriculture officials say they hope to expand the rice shipments to more Asian countries.

Organising tours in no-entry zone

August 21, 2014

Residents plan tour to Fukushima evacuation zone

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Aug. 21, 2014 - Updated 19:17 UTC+2

A group of residents near Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant plans to organize guided tours of their hometown. The aim is to keep alive the memory of the 2011 nuclear accident.

Areas in 7 municipalities around the nuclear plant are part of a designated no-entry evacuation zone due to high radiation levels there. Residents need to acquire permission to enter the area.

A group of residents of Okuma town say they want outsiders to know that the impact of the accident still lingers. Okuma is one of two towns that host the plant.

The residents plan to organize a 2-day excursion from Tokyo. The tour would visit the town office and a shopping district several kilometers away from the nuclear plant.

Participants would wear protective gear and view the no-entry zone from inside a bus. They would also observe rebuilding efforts outside the zone. The visitors would be checked for radiation exposure after their inspection.

The local group plans to operate the tour once a month from October.

Group representative Chieko Watanabe says she feels some people are starting to forget about the nuclear accident. She says she is aware some people may oppose such a tour. But she adds she hopes it would encourage people to think about the situation around the nuclear plant.

Fukushima rice in Singapore again

August 22, 2014

Singapore resumes Fukushima rice imports

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140823_01.html

Aug. 22, 2014 - Updated 18:48 UTC+2

Sales of rice from northeastern Japan's Fukushima Prefecture have resumed in Singapore after being halted in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

Japan's National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations has been trying to convince overseas markets of the safety of rice grown in Fukushima.

Sales of the rice in Singapore began on Friday. Five kilogram bags of the Koshi-hikari brand were back on the shelves of one Japanese-run supermarket.

A detailed notice explained how the produce was checked for radioactivity.

Japanese living in Singapore, as well as local residents, were among the first to purchase the newly exported rice.

One Singaporean said he has no problem with rice from Fukushima, as he trusts Singaporean inspectors and the Japanese people. But not all Singaporean consumers seem convinced.

One supermarket manager expressed hope that customers will understand that rice from Fukushima has been determined to be safe.

Photo exhibit in Paris

August 25, 2014

Students from tsunami-hit, nuke disaster-affected towns to hold photo exhibit in Paris

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201408250040

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

High school students from a tsunami-ravaged town in Tohoku and a municipality near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant will hold a joint exhibition of then-and-now photographs in Paris to present their common grief of losing “the present.”

Five first-year senior high school students from Otsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, swamped by the March 2011 tsunami, and from Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, all of whose residents have evacuated since the nuclear crisis started to unfold at the plant, will also speak of their experiences in front of the Eiffel Tower on Aug. 30-31.

This event will take place as part of the OECD Tohoku School project, which started in the spring of 2012. Yuta Miura, 15, one of the students from Otsuchi, said he saw his home swept away by the towering tsunami from the bank he had fled to.

“That day, my mind went blank, and I was unable to think of anything,” said Miura, who was a sixth-grade elementary student at the time. “The life I had taken for granted vanished in front of my eyes.”

Hiroto Natsume, 16, who is originally from Okuma, was told to board a bus without being informed of the destination immediately following the onset of the nuclear disaster. It was the last time he has seen his hometown.

“I felt as if I was deprived of my hometown,” said Natsume, who currently lives in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.

The five students got to know each other in March 2012 at the first gathering for the Tohoku School project, when they were first-year junior high school students. They decided to hold a photo exhibition together to give others an idea of what had happened to their towns.

The two municipalities were both heavily affected by the 2011 disaster. But while recovery work has been steadily proceeding in Otsuchi, residents of Okuma have yet to be allowed to return to their homes. Feeling how critically different their circumstances were from each other, the Otsuchi members and Okuma students decided to exhibit their pictures at separate booths.

It was an insensitive question from a journalist that led Rinoa Nakai, a member of the photo exhibition project from Otsuchi, to change the group's mind.

A reporter asked one of her friends who lost a grandfather and elder brother in the disaster, “What if the deceased appeared in front of you right now?”

Being at her friend's side at that time, Nakai, now 16, thought the news media were inconsiderate.

“I felt that for those living in areas outside the affected region, the disaster was just somebody else's affair,” the student said.

In March, Nakai visited Fukushima Prefecture and proposed that the students display all works at the same booth, so that their situations would not be “someone else’s matter.” The other members agreed. They believe that the tsunami and the nuclear accident are the same problem in essence, because both were brought on by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake.

To emphasize the point, they plan to conclude their speeches at the Paris exhibition, which will be delivered separately by students from the respective towns, with the very same words.

“We all have lost ‘the present,’ ” the students plan to say in conclusion. “It is impossible to know in advance when and where a tsunami or a nuclear accident will occur. Do not look on our affairs as somebody else’s concerns.”

Disaster & Govt negligence

August 25, 2014

Editorial: Earthquake disaster refugees falling through cracks of gov't negligence

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140825p2a00m0na010000c.html>

This matter goes right to the root of disaster recovery support. The Reconstruction Agency is now churning through data to come up with a new figure for the number of people made refugees by 2011's Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns after finding that central and local government estimates were well off the mark.

What's especially surprising about the massive miscount is the sloppy handling of relevant data, which is the very basis for disaster recovery policy. We call on the government to consider a uniform management policy for all data on its support for long-term evacuees, and thereby prevent those who fled the Fukushima nuclear disaster of their own accord from being cut out of the assistance loop.

One case of a poorly managed refugee estimate happened in Saitama Prefecture. The prefectural government only counted people using prefectural and municipal temporary housing as disaster refugees, and only did regular recounts in a few cities and towns. That the true number was quite a bit more was discovered when a local citizens' group pointed out that the prefecture's disaster refugee count seemed too low.

The Saitama Prefectural Government stated that there were 2,640 evacuees from the 2011 disasters living within its jurisdiction as of June this year. Simply toting up all the refugees living in municipalities in the prefecture, however, apparently showed there were possibly more than 5,000 evacuees within Saitama Prefecture's borders.

Why the discrepancy? In May 2011, about two months after the magnitude 9.0 earthquake hit Japan's northeast, the Cabinet Office asked prefectural governments to total up the number of disaster refugees in their jurisdictions based on the type of place they were staying in. Actually confirming these numbers proved difficult in practice, however, and in July 2012 Saitama Prefecture told the central government that it would stop counting evacuees receiving direct housing assistance from the Fukushima Prefectural Government and other sources.

For its part, the central government failed to set comprehensive standards for counting evacuees, suggesting that the lowball number of refugees is the result of a mutual failure to communicate.

It's quite possible that Saitama Prefecture is not the only government body miscounting its refugee population. Reconstruction Agency figures for July this year put the number of refugees at 247,233 nationwide. However, the agency has asked all the prefectures for a recount that includes "voluntary"

nuclear disaster evacuees. Standing here in the summer of 2014, you could say this is too little, too late, but then it also goes without saying that double-checking evacuee figures is a necessary step. There are in fact two running counts of nuclear disaster refugees; one by the Reconstruction Agency, and one based on the number of evacuees from 13 municipalities in eastern Fukushima Prefecture. The latter is the basis for assistance under the special law on nuclear disaster refugees, and most of these evacuees have filed assistance claims with the local governments where they now live. What this figure does not include, however, are people who left their homes in Fukushima Prefecture on their own recognizance, for whom there is no support system. As such, these evacuees are not even informed of available support measures. Efforts must be made to make sure these people are not overlooked. Right after the March 2011 disasters, the government briefly considered allowing refugees to list a "second address" on their resident certificates, but the idea was dropped due to legal difficulties. In April 2011, the government set up a "national evacuee information system" to allow refugees to report their own status. The information on the system, however, soon proved to be out of kilter with reality, and it is no longer used for nationwide evacuee number estimates. The true number of people who remain disaster refugees more than three years after that terrible March day is unknown, lost in the cracks of government negligence. To ensure that recovery assistance is delivered smoothly to those who need it, the government has a responsibility to set standards and expand the activities of existing support systems to their maximum potential. It must come up with good ideas, and fast.

Whitebait fishing resumed

August 26, 2014

Whitebait fishing resumes off Fukushima Pref.

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140826_31.html

Aug. 26, 2014 - Updated 09:31 UTC+2

Fishermen have resumed catching whitebait off Fukushima Prefecture for the first time in nearly 4 years, although on a trial basis.

Whitebait fishing off the coast of Iwaki City is conducted in spring and autumn. It was halted after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011, with the last catch taking place in October 2010.

Trial fishing operations were to resume in September last year, but were postponed when highly radioactive wastewater was found to be leaking out to sea from the damaged plant.

On Tuesday, 17 small fishing boats left ports in the city and caught whitebait several kilometers offshore.

The roughly 3-centimeter-long fish will be boiled and then dried before shipment.

The local fishermen's cooperative says the day's 3-ton catch has been tested for radioactive material and confirmed safe.

Whitebait is one of the main hauls for the city's small-boat fishermen and a key to reviving the local fishing industry.

The head of a group of local whitebait fishermen says the catch will be limited to once a week for the time being, but is a step forward all the same.

August 26, 2014

11,000 evacuee students still at school elsewhere

August 27, 2014

More than 10,000 students affected by 2011 disasters still in schools in other prefectures

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/quake_tsunami/AJ201408270036

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Three years after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear crisis, more than 11,000 students from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures are still attending schools in other prefectures.

According to the education ministry, there were 11,452 such transfer students as of May 1.

The ministry announced the results of its survey on Aug. 26.

Compared to a year earlier, the number of kindergarten, elementary, junior high and high school students transferred from those prefectures dropped by 1,351. Children who have returned to their homes as well as those who became irrelevant to the survey for reasons such as graduation from high school account for the decreased number.

“(The figures show that some students) returned to their homes, but the impact (of the disasters) still remains,” said an official with the ministry.

By prefecture, Fukushima Prefecture, which hosts the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, had the largest exodus of students, at 9,767, a drop of 1,219 students from the previous year. In Miyagi Prefecture, the number of students who have already changed to a school outside the prefecture decreased by 74 to 1,400 students. The figure in Iwate Prefecture dropped by 58 to 285 students. Regarding the prefectures to which the students have moved, Yamagata Prefecture had the largest number of incoming students from outside the prefecture, at 1,272. In Niigata Prefecture, the number of students who have already moved to the prefecture was 1,157. The number of such students in Saitama was 889.

How to help Fukushima survivors?

August 26, 2014

Fukushima's high number of disaster-related suicides likely due to nuclear crisis: Cabinet Office

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/26/national/social-issues/fukushimas-high-number-disaster-related-suicides-likely-due-nuclear-crisis-cabinet-office/#.U_4QymOnrIU

KYODO

Fukushima – The number of suicides in Fukushima Prefecture linked to 3/11 is higher than fifty-six suicides in Fukushima between June 2011, when they began to be tracked, and this July, were linked to the disasters of March 11, 2011.

The extended time that evacuees have had to stay away from their homes may have affected the Fukushima figure, a Cabinet Office official said.

Although the Cabinet Office has set up a suicide prevention hotline and dispatched counselors to aid residents of temporary housing in Fukushima, such measures have proved to be insufficient.

Officials said Iwate and Miyagi, the two other prefectures hit hardest by the earthquake and tsunami, had fewer disaster-related suicides. The number was 30 in Iwate and 37 in Miyagi.

Since 10 people in Fukushima took their lives in 2011, the number has risen steadily, reaching 13 in 2012 and 23 in 2013. As of July, 10 suicides in the prefecture had been recorded this year.

Factors such as suicide notes and relatives' statements are used to help determine whether 3/11 contributed to a person's death.

sewhere, most likely because of the nuclear disaster, according to the Cabinet Office.

EDITORIAL: Society must find ways to reduce stress of Fukushima survivors

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201408270026>

In July 2011, Hamako Watanabe committed suicide by setting herself ablaze. Having been forced to evacuate her home in Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, after the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March that year, Watanabe was allowed to return home for a short visit. That was when she killed herself.

Her husband and children sued Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, for damages. After two years of hearings, the Fukushima District Court on Aug. 26 ruled that TEPCO is responsible for her death. The verdict stressed the extreme stress suffered by Watanabe and her family. Forced out of her familiar surroundings and deprived of work, she could not envision any future. Her emotional anguish must have been tremendous.

The verdict also pointed out that TEPCO should have been able to foresee that a nuclear accident would force local residents into evacuation, and that some evacuees might choose to end their lives.

Since the nuclear accident brought drastic changes to the environment and the lives of the affected people, it is difficult to deny the causal relationship between the accident and Watanabe's suicide. It was a reasonable verdict.

In fact, Watanabe is not the only Fukushima evacuee who committed suicide. The court verdict reminds us anew of the unending nature of the suffering that the triple meltdown has brought.

So far, any connection between the accident and the suicides has been kept vague. There were cases where TEPCO flatly denied causality in negotiations for compensation, or offered to pay only paltry sums that were nowhere near what the bereaved families sought.

In Watanabe's lawsuit, TEPCO effectively hinted at the weakness of her character as the cause of her suicide. The utility ought to be thoroughly ashamed of itself for making such an allegation.

Whether she was strong or weak is irrelevant. There is no excuse for causing Watanabe so much stress as to drive her to suicide.

Since every suicide involves a range of factors, such as problems with health or family relations, it is never easy to determine the exact cause. Still, since Watanabe's case occurred while she and her family were living as evacuees, there is no question that the nuclear disaster had either a direct or indirect affect on her decision.

The number of suicides related to the Great East Japan Earthquake is determined by police after investigation. According to statistics compiled by the Cabinet Office, the number grew from year to year in Fukushima Prefecture: 10 in 2011, 13 in 2012 and 23 in 2013. Fukushima has had more suicides than Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, and as of the end of July, 10 people had killed themselves in Fukushima this year.

Of these 56 suicides, nearly half were in their 50s and 60s. Where the causes were known, 27 suicides had to do with health issues and 15 with economic or livelihood-related issues.

What is most important now is to prevent more tragedies rooted in the 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

In addition to national and regional administrative authorities and TEPCO, our society needs to quickly come up with ways to minimize the stress of survivors so that they do not think about taking their own lives.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 27

TEPCO ordered to pay damage over suicide

August 27, 2014

Widower of woman who committed suicide hails court ruling over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140827p2a00m0na013000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The widower of a woman who killed herself nearly four months after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis discreetly welcomed the ruling on Aug. 26 by the Fukushima District Court in which Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) was ordered to pay some 49 million yen in damages over her suicide.

In July 2011, Hamako Watanabe poured gasoline on herself and burned herself to death in the garden of her house in Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, during a temporary visit. It is a tragedy that happened in connection with forced evacuations of local residents in the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster. In its ruling on Aug. 26 this year, the Fukushima District Court clearly acknowledged the causal relationship between the suicide and the nuclear disaster. Her husband Mikio Watanabe, 64, wiped away tears with a handkerchief when he heard the ruling in the courtroom. "This will let her family who has been distressed and torn apart have some peace of mind," he said.

"My wife liked the Yamakiya district, and more than anything else, she liked this house. I think she thought this would be the only place where she could die," Mikio said in the living room of his two-story house in Kawamata's Yamakiya district, a restricted residential zone. His wife was proud of the house, which is 14 years old now, as she had worked out its floor plan together with her husband.

On the morning of July 1, 2011, Hamako committed suicide under a willow that was growing naturally in the garden of her house. The Yamakiya district was designated as an evacuation zone after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, and the couple moved to an apartment in Fukushima city half a month before Hamako killed herself. The couple lost their jobs because the farm they had worked at was shut down.

The couple had subsequently lived their lives without any acquaintances and jobs. Hamako became reluctant to go out, saying, "People stare at me because I am a yokel and wearing odd clothes." She lost her appetite and lost 5 kilograms in about two weeks. She was crying, "I want to return to Yamakiya." On June 30, 2011, Mikio proposed to have an overnight stay in their house, which was not allowed at that time, in order to cheer her up.

The trial Mikio himself had sought dragged on for more than two years. "I don't want to end up seeing her as a mere suicide. I want to hold TEPCO accountable for her death," Mikio said. He said that at times he had wanted to forget about her suicide.

He felt pain recollecting the circumstances at the time of the tragic death of his wife whenever he visited the court and got interviewed by the media.

Mikio was inspired by a speech at school by his 15-year-old granddaughter. The granddaughter said about Hamako's death at a school speech contest in the autumn of last year, "I decided to think not only about the grief but also about the fact that she taught us about the horrors of the great earthquake the hard way. A better future emerges from pain and sorrow as steppingstones." Mikio said he had felt he was told by his granddaughter to firmly get a grip of himself.

At a news conference held after the ruling was handed down, Mikio said, "I want to tell Hamako that it was good to have filed the lawsuit and 'please rest in peace'." On TEPCO, he said, "I want them to take the ruling seriously and apologize."

It remains unclear when he can return to his home although decontamination efforts are moving forward in the area near his home. If the evacuation order is lifted, Mikio plans to make a fresh start at the house where he had lived with his wife.

August 26, 2014

TEPCO ordered to pay damages over nuclear evacuee's suicide

Attorneys representing the plaintiffs hold "victory" signs after the Fukushima District Court's ruling on a case involving the suicide of a nuclear disaster evacuee, in Fukushima on Aug. 26, 2014. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140826p2g00m0dm064000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex on Tuesday was ordered for the first time by a Japanese district court to pay damages over a suicide case recognized to have causal links with the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The Fukushima District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 49 million yen in compensation to relatives of Hamako Watanabe, who burned herself to death at age 58 after she was forced to evacuate her home due to the nuclear crisis. Watanabe's husband and three other relatives have sought 91 million yen. In handing down the ruling, Presiding Judge Naoyuki Shiomi said Watanabe's mental anguish was "huge," citing the despair she felt in the face of an uncertain future as an evacuee.

TEPCO said it will study the content of the ruling and respond to it "sincerely."

It is the first ruling in a lawsuit in which compensation has been sought from the utility over a suicide linked to the disaster that caused serious radiation contamination. Some 125,000 Fukushima residents continue to live as evacuees.

According to the written indictment, the area in the town of Kawamata where Watanabe's home stands was designated as an evacuation zone on April 22, 2011, about a month after the crisis was triggered by a massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan.

The home was located about 40 kilometers away from the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Watanabe and other family members evacuated to an apartment in the city of Fukushima in June, but she burned herself to death with gasoline on July 1 when she temporarily returned to her home.

The plaintiffs have said Watanabe's mental state deteriorated because she was not able to foresee when she could return home and the chicken farm where the couple worked had closed in June.

TEPCO has admitted the nuclear accident had placed a severe psychological burden on Watanabe. But the utility also said other factors could have affected her, noting she had trouble sleeping before the accident and was on medication.

After the ruling, Mikio Watanabe, her 64-year-old husband, said he was "very happy" that the court showed understanding of the family's struggle.

An attorney for the plaintiffs called the ruling a "full victory" and added, "This is going to be extremely significant for future nuclear compensation issues."

TEPCO has previously agreed to pay damages to the bereaved family of a farmer who committed suicide at age 64 on March 24, 2011, through an out-of-court settlement.

Fukushima court orders damages for evacuee suicide

Nuclear & Energy

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140826_28.html

Aug. 26, 2014 - Updated 08:50 UTC+2

A Fukushima court has ordered the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to pay about 470,000 dollars in damages for the suicide of a woman who was forced to leave her home.

In a ruling on Tuesday the Fukushima District Court acknowledged a sufficient causal relationship between the suicide and the nuclear accident.

Hamako Watanabe poured gasoline on herself and set herself alight when she was allowed a temporary visit home in July 2011. Her home was in the Yamakiya area of Kawamata Town, about 35 kilometers northwest of the crippled plant. The area is a designated evacuation zone.

Her husband and 3 children said her death was caused by depression and pessimism about the future after she was forced to live away from home.

They sued Tokyo Electric Power Company for nearly 900,000 dollars.

TEPCO notes this is the first time that it has been ordered by a court to pay damages for a suicide said to be caused by the nuclear accident.

The operator said it prays the deceased will rest in peace and will examine the contents of the ruling to continue to act sincerely.

Court orders TEPCO to compensate family of Fukushima woman who committed suicide

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408260050>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--The Fukushima District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 49 million yen (\$471,600) in compensation to the family of a woman who committed suicide by setting herself ablaze after being forced to evacuate her home.

The ruling was the first to recognize the correlation between the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and a suicide by an evacuee, according to the attorneys representing the plaintiffs.

The lawsuit was filed by her husband, Mikio Watanabe, and three family members in May 2012, demanding that the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant pay 91 million yen in damages for the death of Hamako, 58, who killed herself in July 2011 in the yard of the family home.

The Watanabes lived in the Yamakiya district of Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, until the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011 triggered the nuclear disaster at the nearby TEPCO plant. They evacuated to Fukushima city in June 2011.

In the lawsuit, the plaintiffs argued that "the nuclear disaster abruptly took away Yamakiya's lush nature and (the victim's) ties with her warmhearted neighbors, resulting in the depression that caused her suicide."

After they evacuated from their home, Hamako lost weight and suffered from insomnia after failing to adjust to her new life living in an apartment in the city.

She also was despondent over losing her job at a farm in the Yamakiya district, which was forced to close after the nuclear disaster.

Watanabe said his wife wanted to return to Yamakiya, and that she committed suicide by self-immolation while home on a temporary visit.

One of the key arguments in the trial was whether Hamako's death was directly caused by the crisis at the nuclear plant.

"(Hamako's) personal vulnerability also influenced her own death," TEPCO officials argued during the trial.

Fukushima produce sold in Jakarta

August 29, 2014

Fukushima peaches and pears sold in Jakarta

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140829_40.html

Aug. 29, 2014 - Updated 11:36 UTC+2

High-quality peaches and pears from Japan's Fukushima Prefecture have gone on sale in Indonesia for the first time.

Indonesia is the 4th country to import agricultural produce from Fukushima following the 2011 nuclear accident.

Sales of the peaches and pears began at a high-end supermarket in Jakarta on Friday. They're part of a 520-kilogram shipment.

Officials and farm cooperatives from the prefecture asked customers to taste the fruit and appreciate its quality. One customer purchased 3 peaches that cost more than 13 dollars apiece.

An Indonesian woman who bought both types of fruit said they're fresh and delicious. She said she has eaten food from Fukushima abroad, and is not worried about its safety.

Fukushima fruit farmers have been hit hard by import restrictions in Hong Kong and Taiwan, previously key overseas markets. They now have high hopes in Indonesia due to its economic growth.

Prefectural official Jinko Kokubo said Fukushima's peaches and pears are the best in the world, and that she wants many countries to have the pleasure of eating them.

Fukushima residents sue Pref and Govt

August 30, 2014

Fukushima families sue prefecture, government for radiation exposure during meltdown crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/30/national/fukushima-families-sue-prefecture-government-for-radiation-exposure-during-meltdown-crisis/#.VAHJAWOnq1s>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – A group of parents and children who were residing in Fukushima Prefecture when the nuclear disaster unfolded in March 2011 is suing the central and prefectural governments for failing to take sufficient steps to protect children from radiation exposure during the crisis.

The 88 plaintiffs are demanding ¥100,000 each in compensation, according to the lawsuit filed Friday at the Fukushima District Court.

In a written complaint, they said the central and prefectural governments failed to promptly release accurate data on airborne radiation levels after the nuclear crisis, neglecting their duty to prevent residential radiation exposure as much as possible, and exposing children to radiation.

The three core meltdowns were triggered when the massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, caused a blackout at the poorly protected Fukushima No. 1 power station and knocked out its reactors' primary and backup cooling systems, allowing the fuel to heat up and melt and causing hydrogen explosions that destroyed the containment buildings, ejecting radioactive material into the atmosphere. As a result, the parents and children are seriously worried about their health down the road and are suffering from mental distress, they said in the complaint.

A 40-year-old mother in the group said at a news conference that she decided to sue because her child became ill after the nuclear crisis. "We've suffered in trying desperately to escape from something invisible for the past 3½ years," she said, referring to the radioactive fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, which is managed by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Of the 88 plaintiffs, 24 children who live in Fukushima and are still attending school there are demanding that local municipal offices affirm their right to receive education in a safe environment.

TEPCO to pay more damage

September 1, 2014

Lawyers call on TEPCO to accept settlements

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140902_01.html

Sep. 1, 2014 - Updated 18:24 UTC+2

A group of Japanese lawyers is urging the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to pay more nuclear damage settlements to Fukushima residents. Lawyers with the Japan Federation of Bar Associations told reporters on Monday that TEPCO is not honoring its promise to respect proposals from the Science Ministry's dispute settlement center. The ministry established the center in 2011 in order to mediate disputes between TEPCO and residents who have serious claims against the utility following the accident at the Fukushima plant. More than 8,000 cases have been settled since the center started accepting applications 3 years ago. But the lawyers said TEPCO have recently rejected a series of the

center's settlement proposals. They include a class action suit filed by more than 15,000 residents of the town of Namie. A JFBA lawyer in charge of compensation for the nuclear accident, Yuichi Kaido, said the center has had a significant meaning for restoring the rights of the victims of the Fukushima accident who cannot directly negotiate with TEPCO. But he said he is increasingly worried about the utility's response. He said TEPCO promised to respect settlement proposals in its business plan earlier this year. He said the firm is instead causing the residents further suffering by rejecting the offers.

Thank you, Fukushima

September 1, 2014

Abe thanks Fukushima for 'tough decision'

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140901_27.html

Sep. 1, 2014 - Updated 10:12 UTC+2

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has thanked Fukushima's governor for his decision to accept the construction of intermediate radioactive waste storage facilities in the prefecture.

Abe met Governor Yuhei Sato on Monday after Sato informed the government of the decision.

Sato said hosting the facilities will impose a heavy burden on local communities, but he decided to accept the plan to speed up Fukushima's recovery.

He asked the government to present blueprints for the future of the evacuation zones and to continue providing financial support to revive the local economy.

Abe said that he understands it was a tough decision, and he thanks the governor for making it.

Abe added that Fukushima's reconstruction is essential to the recovery of northeastern areas hit by the 2011 disaster.

He said the government will work together with people in Fukushima to help revive the region.

Mixed feelings

September 1, 2014

Residents give mixed reactions to decision

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140901_26.html

Sep. 1, 2014 - Updated 09:38 UTC+2

Evacuees from Okuma Town are conveying mixed reactions to the decision to build an intermediate storage facility for radioactive waste in their town.

A 57-year-old woman says the town has to host the radioactive waste facility because other communities won't accept it. Her home stands on the site where the facility will be built.

She is asking the government to do more to help evacuees rebuild their lives.

An 80-year-old man, whose house is also on the planned site, says they will have to accept the facility. He says more information should have been provided to land owners.

A woman who is 77 is concerned for her future. She is not eligible for compensation because her home is not on the construction site.

She says she doesn't want the facility in the town. But she also understands its necessity.

Tree of hope in Paris

September 3, 2014

Fukushima student gets her wish by planting sakura tree of hope in Paris

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201409030046

By NATSUKI EDOGAWA/ Staff Writer

PARIS--A high school girl from Fukushima Prefecture who was forced to evacuate due to the nuclear crisis planted a sakura cherry tree in the French capital as a symbol of hope for the recovery of the Tohoku region.

"I won't give up hope, just like Tohoku," said 17-year-old Rina Matsumoto, who planted the tree on Sept. 2 on the grounds of the headquarters for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Matsumoto was forced to evacuate from her hometown of Naraha after the onset of the nuclear crisis caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Her father works for Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and she was separated from him for three weeks after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. When she finally saw him again, he appeared pale and exhausted, as he was one of the workers who had been struggling to contain the crisis.

Matsumoto said she was shunned by classmates at her new school because her father worked for TEPCO, but she kept it from her family and told them her classmates were friendly.

Matsumoto currently attends Iwaki High School in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, and participates in the OECD Tohoku School project, established in August 2011 by the OECD in cooperation with the education ministry and Fukushima University. The project aspires to assist the education of about 100 junior and senior high school students from the disaster-stricken prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate.

When she heard about a sakura tree from Iwate Prefecture that survived the massive tsunami and blossomed, she said she was inspired by the tree's strength and vitality.

It motivated her and made her determined to show the world the strength of the cherry blossom tree, which she said mirrors herself and other evacuees who have endured the hardships of living away from home.

Matsumoto was determined to plant a cherry blossom tree from Tohoku at the OECD headquarters in Paris, but Tohoku cherry tree seedlings could not be imported to France due to quarantine regulations. An OECD member eventually came to the rescue and brought Matsumoto a cherry tree from Yamagata Prefecture that was imported to France decades before the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

It may not have been exactly what she had in mind, but Matsumoto was finally able to plant her symbol of hope in Paris.

"I will keep hope until cherry blossoms that were revived from the tsunami bloom here in Paris," she said.

TEPCO forced to apologise

September 8, 2014

TEPCO apologizes family over evacuee suicide

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140908_39.html

Sep. 8, 2014 - Updated 13:20 UTC+2

The operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant apologized to the family of a woman who committed suicide after she was forced to evacuate her home because of radiation released by the meltdowns in March 2011.

The Fukushima District Court last month ordered the Tokyo Electric Power Company to pay about 470,000 dollars in damages for the suicide of Hamako Watanabe.

The court acknowledged a sufficient causal relationship between her suicide and the nuclear accident.

TEPCO last Friday announced it will not appeal the ruling to a higher court.

The head of a TEPCO task force handling compensation matters in Fukushima, Michitaka Kondo, and other officials visited the Watanabe's family in Kawamata Town on Monday.

The officials thanked her husband, Mikio, for granting them the opportunity to apologize him in person.

They apologized for the accident, which they said ultimately took Hamako's life. They said they will pray for her repose.

Mikio thanked the officials for their sincerity, but said their apologies will not bring his wife back.

Death settlement slashed

September 2, 2014

Gov't body cuts compensation for deaths over Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140902p2a00m0na018000c.html>

The government-backed body that handles the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) for the Fukushima nuclear disaster has set the causal relationship between evacuee deaths and the nuclear disaster at below 50 percent in over 80 percent of the 120 settlement proposals so far, it has been learned.

On Aug. 26, the Fukushima District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to pay some 49 million yen in damages to the family of a 58-year-old woman who killed herself after she was forced to

evacuate due to the Fukushima nuclear plant meltdown. The court recognized that 80 percent of the cause of her suicide was due to stress caused by the nuclear disaster and calculated the compensation amount accordingly. Therefore, the Mainichi Shimbun's latest finding demonstrates the fact that the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center has been reducing compensation to the families of those who died after evacuating from the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

The dispute resolution center calculates the amount of compensation for death in its settlement proposal by multiplying a "standard amount" by a percentage figure representing the impact of the nuclear accident upon the particular case at hand. For this reason, its decision on the contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster to the deaths vastly affects compensation payouts.

Based on the center's replies to the Mainichi's inquiries and explanations the center has given to lawyers for the victims, there are about 120 compensation proposals over deaths that the center has presented to the bereaved families so far. The highest contribution ratio of the nuclear accident it has assigned in these deaths is "50 percent," and that covers just over 50 cases, or slightly more than 40 percent of the total.

About 40 percent of the total cases are attributed to a contribution ratio of less than 50 percent. Only around 20 percent of the total cases are attributed to a contribution ratio of over 50 percent, while more than 80 percent of the cases are attributed to a contribution ratio of less than 50 percent.

The center also sets the standard compensation amount for such deaths at less than 20 million yen, several million yen less than the compensation payout for a traffic fatality. Therefore, the average compensation amount the center has proposed is likely to be no more than several million yen each.

The dispute resolution center's internal document on methods of calculating compensation for deaths has already come to light. The document says the center sets compensation uniformly at "50 percent," and if it is deemed difficult to apply the "50 percent rule," a ratio of "10 percent" can be applied as an "exception," among other details. Therefore, the center apparently has been making decisions on proposed compensation amounts based on these calculation methods.

In the case of the 58-year-old Fukushima woman's suicide, TEPCO presented documents to the court. In the papers, the utility said that in the separate cases of a 30-year-old man who committed suicide after moving out of an evacuation zone to find shelter outside Fukushima Prefecture, and a 63-year-old woman in a then "standby evacuation zone" who killed herself, the center put the contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster to their deaths at 10 percent each.

The utility also said in the documents that in the case of a 64-year-old male farmer in a voluntary evacuation zone who committed suicide, the center put the contribution ratio at 30 percent. In the lawsuit filed by the bereaved family of the 58-year-old woman, TEPCO had insisted that the court calculate compensation for the woman based on a low contribution ratio of the nuclear disaster like the way the dispute resolution center was doing.

Motomitsu Nakagawa, one of the lawyers for the bereaved family of the 58-year-old woman, said, "Those who died during evacuation must have suffered stress similar to that for the woman. In no way can the dispute resolution center make an easy decision based on such things as '50 percent across the board.'" On the finding that the ADR has set the causal relationship between over 80 percent of the deaths and the nuclear disaster at below 50 percent, he said, "It has become clear that the ADR cannot be trusted. It raises the question as to who the ADR is working for. Unless our clients ask for it, we will not use the ADR any longer."

September 02, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

New ministers visit Fukushima

September 7, 2014

New industry minister Obuchi visits crisis-hit Fukushima No. 1 plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/07/national/new-industry-minister-obuchi-visits-crisis-hit-fukushima-1-plant/#.VAyssGOnq1s>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Just days after assuming the post, new industry minister Yuko Obuchi visited the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on Sunday.

Speaking to workers dealing with reactor decommissioning and the buildup of radioactive water at the site, the economy, trade and industry minister said, “Because of your dedicated work, we are seeing progress step by step.”

During the visit to the plant, Obuchi held talks with officials of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. and contractors on the challenges they face.

Obuchi then went to the top floor of the No. 4 reactor building where fuel is being removed from the spent fuel pool and observed work to build another water treatment system to reduce radiation levels of the massive amount of radioactive water being kept in tanks.

She also checked the progress of a government-funded project to build an underground ice wall around the basements of the Nos. 1-4 reactor buildings to prevent groundwater from further seeping into the buildings and becoming contaminated with radioactive substances.

Regarding radioactive water issues, Obuchi admitted that problems have occurred but noted the “overall” situation is “under control.”

Obuchi, daughter of late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and the youngest member of the Cabinet, was appointed as economy, trade and industry minister on Wednesday when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reshuffled his Cabinet.

See also:

September 8, 2014

New industry minister Obuchi visits crisis-hit Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140908p2g00m0dm023000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- New industry minister Yuko Obuchi on Sunday visited the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, days after assuming her ministerial post.

[...]

September 5, 2014

New environment minister visits Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140905_38.html

Sep. 5, 2014 - Updated 13:19 UTC+2

Japan's new environment minister, Yoshio Mochiduki, has told leading politicians of Fukushima that he will work hard to gain local consent for the construction of interim radioactive waste storage facilities in the prefecture.

Mochiduki on Friday visited Fukushima Prefecture for the first time since assuming his post earlier this week.

He met Governor Yuhei Sato at the prefectural office.

Mochiduki said the government will never forget that accepting construction of the facilities was a very harsh decision for the local communities.

He said he will make every effort to establish a relationship of trust with the local communities through careful explanations.

Sato asked the minister to push on with the project in consideration of people living as evacuees.

Mochiduki said the government will work hard to enact legislation in the autumn Diet session to stipulate that the stored waste will be moved out of Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years.

The minister then met the mayor of Okuma Town, Toshitsuna Watanabe. The storage facilities will be built in Okuma and Futaba towns.

Mochiduki asked for cooperation, saying that the government will give detailed and easy-to-understand explanations to owners of land at the planned site and others concerned.

The mayor said the priority is to gain understanding from the landowners and that he hopes the government will perform its duty with clear explanations.

Sunflowers sweetening return

September 5, 2014

Sunflowers in full bloom greet nuclear evacuees on temporary return home

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140905p2a00m0na004000c.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima -- Thousands of sunflowers are in full bloom in this nuclear disaster-hit town, providing encouragement for residents temporarily visiting the area, which is still designated as an evacuation zone.

The sunflowers were planted on farmland in the Ogawara district of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma from seeds donated from across the country for the area's recovery.

Residency in the area remains restricted due to high levels of radiation from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, with all residents still evacuated outside the town nearly 3 1/2 years since the onset of the disaster.

Some 20 volunteers sowed the seeds in June in the hope that residents who saw the sunflowers would feel like coming back to Okuma. Officials at the town's local liaison office have since cared for the plants, weeding the soil. On a slope near the farmland, blue plastic sheets have been used to spell out the message, "Let's return to Okuma."

Residents who were visiting their homes in the area recently stopped at the sunflower field to take pictures of the late-summer scene.

The town of Okuma, along with the neighboring town of Futaba, is a candidate site for the construction of interim storage facilities for radiation-contaminated soil and other waste. Because radiation levels in the

Ogawara district are relatively low, the area is planned to be developed as a stronghold for disaster recovery, complete with research facilities for decontamination work and decommissioning of reactors. "One resident called us about the sunflowers saying, "They cheered me up,"" said a 62-year-old employee at the local liaison office. "I hope residents will feel at ease by seeing the sunflowers blooming in their hometown, which is falling into decay (as a result of the disaster)."
September 05, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Tomato-growing in Fukushima

September 4, 2014

JR East enters tomato-growing business to help rebuild Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201409040045>

By SHIMPEI DOI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--East Japan Railway Co. (JR East) and an agricultural co-op on Sept. 4 set up a joint company to produce tomatoes and help revitalize the area devastated by the March 2011 disaster. JR Tomato Land Iwaki Farm plans to grow the tomatoes with high sugar content in a 17,000-square-meter plant. Computers will be used to control the environmental conditions, including temperature, humidity, sunlight and carbon dioxide concentrations.

The companies' annual target is 600 tons of tomatoes from 2016. By using direct sunlight, they can reduce the amount of electricity used for artificial light.

The tomatoes will be sold at produce shops inside JR stations and used by eateries and hotels operated by JR East group companies.

"Agriculture could be a way to reinvigorate the locality," Tetsuro Tomita, president of JR East, told reporters. "We want to help (local agriculture) develop into a growing industry."

JR East said it hopes the vegetable growing business will generate a stable profit and help expedite reconstruction from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Agricultural co-op Tomato Land Iwaki in Fukushima Prefecture provided 50 percent of the investment in the new company, while JR East supplied 49 percent and five local farmers covered the remaining 1 percent.

JR East will provide funds for the new plant.

Gifts sold on website to help disaster-hit Tohoku

September 12, 2014

Young people launch website featuring gift items from 3/11 disaster-hit region

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201409120003>

By NAMI HAMADA/ Staff Writer

After the Great East Japan Earthquake ravaged the Tohoku region, Yuichi Tomohiro immediately headed to Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, as a volunteer worker.

But the young man wanted to do much more to help out, and today, is one of the founders of an online outlet selling traditional handmade gift items from the region to provide assistance to victims.

“I want to give as many consumers as possible an idea of what feelings Tohoku people put into their handmade items,” said Tomohiro, 29, one of the founders of the TOHOK online gift shop (<https://tohok.com/>).

“I want to become a mediator for both creators and consumers to think together about the future of manufacturing in Tohoku,” added Tomohiro, who lives in Tokyo’s Sumida Ward.

While working as a volunteer after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011, Tomohiro met women in Ishinomaki who had been engaged in oyster farming on Miyagi Prefecture’s Oshika Peninsula until the disaster.

Hearing the women complaining that they “feel sorrow for having no jobs,” Tomohiro suggested they produce good-luck ribbons worn around the wrist or other parts of the body from fishing nets.

Over two years from April 2011, the young man sold 3,000 good-luck ribbons, each priced at 1,000 yen (\$9.35), at university festivals and music events throughout Japan.

Encouraged by the success, Tomohiro then released fashion accessories made of horns of deer culled to control their population on the peninsula. But the new products did not sell as well as he expected.

Tomohiro said he realized the difficulty of continuing to persuade customers to purchase Tohoku-featured items just out of sympathy for disaster victims.

The young man thought that presenting high-quality products that have traditionally been manufactured in Tohoku to people across the country under the same brand name will lead to long-continuing assistance for disaster victims.

Tomohiro and his friends spent six months each searching the entire Tohoku region for such traditional, premium articles.

Tomohiro said he was astonished by Tohoku people’s handicrafts.

“A small broom made in Kuji, Iwate Prefecture, is a good example,” he said. “The manufacturing of this item starts with growing the plant to make them. People have been creating the brooms as a second job during the winter, they told me.

“I was surprised at their year-round conscientious efforts.”

Tomohiro and his friends selected 25 gift items made by 12 creators, including stoles crafted from the traditional Aizu cotton weaving technique that dates back four centuries, and “tsutsumiyaki” ceramic pottery made at the kiln workshop in Sendai that catered to the lord of the Date feudal clan.

Then the young people opened their shopping website in March. They also sold their gift items at a special event at a department store in Tokyo in June.

Tomohiro and others decided to sell the traditional handmade products as gift items, because they believed that recipients who are given them as presents can more readily appreciate the careful handiwork of Tohoku craftsmen.

In fact, orders for their products surged around Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and other celebrations, as they expected. A couple in their 30s, for example, bought 60 small brooms as gifts for guests at their wedding reception to take home.

Starting in August, they also began to sell their items at a weekend outdoor market in Tokyo’s Aoyama district.

So many still living in temporary housing

September 11, 2014

89,000 still living in temporary housing in Tohoku disaster area

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201409110032>

By HIDEAKI ISHIBASHI/ Senior Staff Writer

More than 89,000 evacuees are still living in prefabricated temporary housing in northeastern Japan three and a half years after the 3/11 disaster.

The hard-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima reported that as of the end of August, 89,323 people who lost their homes to the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami or were displaced because of the nuclear accident are living in 41,384 temporary housing units in 49 municipalities.

The temporary housing units were only built to last two years.

After the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, it took five years for all residents who moved to temporary accommodation to relocate to permanent housing.

But in the Tohoku disaster, it will likely take longer for the evacuees to find places to settle permanently.

The Reconstruction Agency said the construction of permanent housing units to accommodate evacuees and preparation of land plots for disaster-affected communities will be completed in just 18 municipalities by the end of fiscal 2015, the fifth anniversary of the disaster.

As for the remaining 31 municipalities, local governments will extend the use of temporary housing on a yearly basis as long as permanent housing to accommodate the residents remains short, the Cabinet Office said.

In Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, which has the largest number of households who lost their homes to the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami, the city government plans to construct housing units and prepare land plots to accommodate 7,660 households.

But only about 53 percent will be completed by fiscal 2015. The land development projects to create housing lots to accommodate the disaster-affected communities will not be completed until fiscal 2017, city officials said.

“We have no choice but to maintain the temporary housing until then,” a city official said.

In 13 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, the completion of permanent housing for evacuees is nowhere in sight as local governments are still in the process of negotiating with landowners to obtain land plots.

In areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, decontamination work and recovery of infrastructure lag behind schedule, and it remains unknown when all evacuees can return home.

In addition to the 89,000 people in temporary housing, there are about 90,000 people who live in 38,000 public and private housing units that are rented by local governments on a temporary basis in the three prefectures.

The government had set the duration period for temporary housing at two years, and the units are becoming increasingly decrepit. Many residents have complained about health problems caused by stress from living in cramped temporary housing.

Evacuation order lifted by Gov't

September 12, 2014

Villagers near Fukushima allowed to return

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Sep. 12, 2014 - Updated 07:51 UTC+2

The Japanese government has decided to lift an evacuation order for part of a village near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and all of his Cabinet Ministers reached the decision at a meeting on Friday in Tokyo.

Abe said this is not the final goal, but rather the starting point for the area's reconstruction. He added that the government will actively help the former residents return to the village.

Radiation contamination had forced all the villagers to evacuate following the nuclear accident at the plant in March 2011.

Major road reopened in no-go zone

September 15, 2014

Stretch of road in no-go zone near Fukushima plant reopened to traffic

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140915p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The government has reopened an approximately 14-kilometer stretch of road through an otherwise off-limits zone around the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, judging that decontamination work has sufficiently lowered radiation levels.

The road is a part of National Route No. 6, which runs north to south along the coast, connecting the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Futaba and Tomioka. The section was opened to traffic Sept. 15, making it the first in the so-called "difficult-to-return" no-entry zone to be reopened. Decontamination of the road finished in August.

Futaba, and Okuma, another town that the road passes through, are due to host mid-term storage facilities for radioactive soil from the Fukushima disaster.

According to the Ministry of the Environment, radiation levels on the road peak at 14.7 microsieverts per hour, and average 3.5 microsieverts per hour. Officials conducted a test in which a car was driven at a speed of 40 kilometers per hour for about 42 kilometers through the no-entry zone, including the opened stretch between Futaba and Tomioka. It recorded a radiation level of 1.2 microsieverts, and very little radioactive material stuck to the car. Based on the results, the government gave the OK to reopen the 14-kilometer stretch, but only to automobiles, not bikes or pedestrians. No permission will be needed to use the road.

Hidekiyo Tachiya, mayor of the city of Soma, also in Fukushima Prefecture, welcomed the move.

"More people will come and go, and it should boost local recovery efforts," he said. The opening of the road will cut down what was a four-hour trip when traveling south from Soma to Iwaki to two hours, since a detour around the no-go zone will no longer be necessary.

At the same time, the increase in traffic on the road will also present some challenges to roadside shops. Hiroyoshi Wada, 59, manages a convenience store some 20 kilometers north of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. While he gets plenty of customers in the form of nuclear plant and decontamination workers, it is not easy for him to find store staff.

"I'm glad that sales will rise (because of customers using the newly opened road), but I'm afraid the store won't be able to cope," he says.

There are also concerns from locals that criminals will take advantage of the reopening to break into unattended buildings. The national government is addressing this issue by strengthening barricades at intersections with local roads, while municipalities are installing security cameras and stepping up crime patrols.

September 15, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Major road in Fukushima open for general traffic

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140915_12.html

Sep. 15, 2014 - Updated 03:38 UTC+2

Authorities have lifted a traffic restriction on a major road near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The entire stretch of the No. 6 national highway along the Pacific coast is now open to all four-wheeled vehicles.

Since the March 2011 nuclear disaster, the government has designated local areas with high radiation levels as no-entry zones.

Traffic on the 14-kilometer section of the road that runs through Namie and Tomioka towns had been closed, except to vehicles with special permission.

The restriction was lifted on midnight Sunday, after decontamination and repair work was completed.

Motorcycles, bicycles, and pedestrians are still barred from travelling on the stretch of road. Motorists are also not allowed to get out of their vehicles.

New admissions about compensation

September 18, 2014

Nuclear damages official wrote paper admitting hidden criteria for compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140918p2a00m0na008000c.html>

A senior official at the governmental Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center has authored a paper acknowledging the creation of hidden criteria for setting the compensation amounts for Fukushima nuclear disaster victims, it has been learned.

While the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center, tasked with mediating out-of-court settlements for individual claims filed over the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, has explained to lawyers representing disaster victims that there were "no undisclosed standards," the revelation illustrates a clear contradiction to such explanations. The dispute resolution center came under fire in July after the Mainichi Shimbun reported that the center had set the causal relationship between evacuee deaths and the nuclear disaster at below 50 percent in most of the settlement proposals.

The paper in question was authored by Isomi Suzuki, a lawyer and a member of the three-person general committee, the supreme organ at the dispute resolution center. Suzuki contributed the five-page paper -- titled "Seeking prompt and appropriate implementation of nuclear damage compensation" -- to the July 2012 edition of "Jiyu to Seigi" (Liberty & Justice), an organ for the Japan Federation of Bar Associations.

The dispute resolution center has consistently explained that it calculated compensation amounts based on the "interim guideline" set out by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation -- an organization supervising the dispute resolution center -- as well as the "general standards" drawn up by the center's general committee, denying the existence of any other standards. Both criteria have already been publicized.

However, Suzuki disclosed in his paper that there was what could be described as "a third standard," stating that "The standards that were developed through consultations by multiple mediatory officials in charge of similar cases could also be intended for uniform resolution, if such standards were conveyed to each mediatory official via examiners (lawyers)." Furthermore, Suzuki explained the reason why such a third standard was necessary, saying, "Many of the damage cases have no past precedents to refer to and cannot be dealt with only by these (existing) standards" -- in reference to the abovementioned "interim guidelines" and "general standards."

An internal document of the dispute resolution center obtained earlier by the Mainichi Shimbun includes the following statement: "Compensation for evacuee deaths shall be set across the board at 50 percent. Fine adjustments, such as setting the figure at 40 or 60 percent, shall not be made." It has also emerged that the "50 percent rule" had been applied in at least one case in which the causal relationship between evacuee deaths and the nuclear disaster should apparently be set at 100 percent. An internal source at the dispute resolution center has disclosed to the Mainichi that there are a large number of other internal documents aside from the "50 percent rule" one but that they have not been disclosed to the public.

Upon an inquiry from the Mainichi, Suzuki responded in writing that a third standard "is not binding but refers to the casual exchange of opinions and information sharing -- only to the extent that mediatory officials share their standards and use them as mutual references." He denied the existence of any third standard.

In response, the Mainichi sent further inquiries, pointing out the contradiction between his paper and the dispute resolution center's official views. However, Suzuki only replied, "My answer is the same as the last one," stopping short of offering more detailed explanations.

In the past, Suzuki served on a United Nations panel that calculated compensation amounts for individuals who suffered damage in the 1991 Gulf War and also joined the defense counsel in a damage suit over the 1994 China Airlines crash at then Nagoya Airport.

September 18, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

First rice in 4 years

September 22, 2014

Tsunami-stricken town harvests rice for first time in 4 years

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201409220060>

By KAZUMASA SUGIMURA/ Staff Writer

RIKUZENTAKATA, Iwate Prefecture--As the Tohoku region enters harvest season, rice is being gathered here for the first time since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

Farmers were seen operating combines for harvesting rice stalks in the city's Otomo district on Sept. 20. "I was worried whether the earth would be rich enough to grow our rice," said Tsuyoshi Murakami, a 43-year-old farmer who harvested rice on the day. "But it has grown firmly."

The rice fields were inundated by the massive tsunami unleashed by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, and left covered in debris.

The loss of the fields, as well as equipment, was almost the final blow to local farming businesses, which were already facing an aging population of about 400 farmers and a lack of successors.

However, determined to grow rice again, the farmers formed the Sun Farm Otomo juridical agricultural union in March.

The group reorganized 87 hectares of farmland and restarted farming businesses by planting such rice strains as Takata no Yume, which was developed locally following the disaster.

The harvesting will continue until early October.



Farmers harvest rice in the Otomo district of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, for the



Sympathy doesn't preclude jealousy



A temporary housing complex in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, accommodates evacuees from Naraha, a town that hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

September 23, 2014

SURVEY: Iwaki residents harbor mixed emotions toward Fukushima evacuees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201409230032>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--The majority of residents in this city, which has taken in a large outpouring of the evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, feel sympathy toward them but harbor jealousy toward the compensation they are receiving, according to a new survey.

Iwaki Meisei University sent a questionnaire to 1,500 Iwaki residents in January and collected 678 responses to compile the results in July.

About 24,000 evacuees from the 2011 nuclear accident currently reside in the city of about 326,000 residents.

According to the survey, 72.2 percent of the residents said they sympathize with the evacuees for leading difficult lives with uncertain prospects for the future.

The survey also asked the residents about the amount of compensation provided to them by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, compared to that of the evacuees.

It found that 74.2 percent of the residents feel it is unfair that evacuees receive a monthly compensation of 100,000 yen (\$920) from TEPCO plus compensation to cover the loss of their real estate holdings.

Many of the Iwaki residents were paid a total compensation of 120,000 yen.

A total of 64.7 percent said they feel "envious" toward the evacuees for receiving a much larger amount of compensation.

In the city, the influx of the evacuees is said to have, in part, caused housing shortages and difficulties at local hospitals.

“The central government should make itself accountable for the improvement of the city’s infrastructure and the injection of human resources such as doctors to alleviate the city's obligations in taking in evacuees for a long period of time,” said Ryosuke Takaki, an associate professor of community society at Iwaki Meisei University.

Decontamination?

September 22, 2014

Majority of municipalities planning residential decontamination haven't finished work

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140922p2a00m0na012000c.html>

More than half of the 74 municipalities in the Tohoku and Kanto regions that have planned decontamination of residences in areas where surveys of radioactive pollution are needed have yet to complete the work, a survey by the Mainichi Shimbun has found.

The survey showed that as of the end of June, 40 cities, towns and villages had yet to complete planned decontamination of homes, with at least 311,700 still needing work. In two municipalities -- the Miyagi Prefecture town of Yamamoto and the Fukushima Prefecture town of Shinchi -- residential decontamination had not begun at all.

Altogether, 104 municipalities in the eight prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma, Saitama and Chiba have been designated by the environment minister as areas where surveys of radioactive pollution are needed. The Mainichi Shimbun questioned all of these municipalities on the progress of decontamination of houses, roads, farmland and forests, and received replies from all of them. The survey did not cover schools and other public facilities, where decontamination work has mostly been completed.

Of the 104 municipalities, 74 have made plans to decontaminate residents' homes. Twenty-nine of those that have not yet completed this work are located in Fukushima Prefecture, which has a large number of houses subject to decontamination. At least 286,002 homes in these 29 municipalities still need to be decontaminated. Another four municipalities are located in Tochigi Prefecture, four more in Miyagi Prefecture, two in Ibaraki Prefecture and one in Gunma Prefecture. In these four prefectures, 25,719 residences remain to be cleaned.

When asked how many homes would be decontaminated in the future, three municipalities did not reply. One of them explained that data was still being compiled. The Miyagi Prefecture town of Yamamoto has planned decontamination of 1,495 homes, while the town of Shinchi in Fukushima Prefecture has planned to decontaminate 600 homes, but the work has yet to commence in either of the municipalities.

When questioned why work was not progressing, many municipalities cited a lack of temporary storage areas for radioactive waste.

"We are having extreme difficulty securing places to temporarily store contaminated soil," a representative of the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki said. The Tochigi Prefecture town of Nasu, meanwhile, stated that the process of gaining consent from the vast number of people involved in properties was taking a long time. Other municipalities reported similar difficulties in gaining consent from landowners.

In addition, five municipalities in Iwate, Ibaraki and Fukushima prefectures said that they had finished decontamination at all of the planned locations, but that there was a need for additional decontamination in spots where relatively high levels of radiation were detected, such as under the eaves of homes. Commenting on progress, a representative of the Ministry of the Environment said, "Fukushima Prefecture has a lot of homes to deal with, but it is pretty much on pace to complete its projects by the end of fiscal 2015 or 2016. For other prefectures, if you use the number of houses as a base, then about 90 percent is completed."

Kunihiro Yamada, a professor in environmental studies at Kyoto Seika University, pointed out, "The central government decides on the outline of decontamination methods through guidelines, but leaves the actual task to local bodies, which results in regional differences. There are cases in which hotspots and other problems remain even after the planned work is completed, but the government has yet to present any concrete guidelines for the future."

A total of 70 municipalities had planned to decontaminate roads, but 41 of them had yet to finish the work. In addition, 28 out of 47 municipalities had yet to complete decontaminating farmland, and 36 out of 44 had yet to decontaminate forests.

11,000 evacuee students still at school elsewhere (2)

September 25, 2014

Over 10,000 Fukushima children still studying far from homes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201409250049>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Thousands of students who evacuated following the nuclear disaster triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami are still attending schools away from their homes in Fukushima Prefecture, a survey shows. A total of 15,281 students were transferred from their kindergarten, elementary, junior and senior high schools and special support schools.

Of these, 9,767 are attending schools outside the prefecture, while 5,514 are attending schools in the prefecture.

The survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology was carried out in May. Nearly 130,000 people remain evacuated from their homes in Fukushima Prefecture. A growing number of them have opted to register as residents in their current locations, with many citing radiation fears. A 42-year-old woman from Koriyama in the prefecture explained her decision to move to Kyoto with her son, who is in second grade at elementary school.

"I wish I could raise him in my hometown, but I'm worried about how the radiation will affect his health," she said.

According to a prefectural survey on evacuees in January and February, 15 percent of 20,680 households that gave valid responses said they were "concerned about education and child-rearing."

The figure exceeded 20 percent among evacuees living outside the prefecture.

On a positive note, a growing number of high school students have landed jobs in Fukushima Prefecture after they graduated.

Prefectural officials said 81.6 percent of jobs offered by March to the latest crop of high school graduates were from companies in the prefecture. The figure is a record high since the prefectural government started compiling such data in 2008.

While the figure can be attributed to an increase in job offers related to reconstruction efforts from the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, some believe it shows a shift in attitudes among students. "An increasing number of students want to work within the prefecture," one teacher said.

Kawauchi residents wary about lifting of evacuation order



September 30, 2014

Gov't to lift evacuation order for Fukushima village, but residents wary

Chika Akimoto, the only sixth-grader at Kawauchi Elementary School in Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, receives instruction in September 2014. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140930p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The Japanese government is poised to lift an evacuation order for part of the Fukushima prefectural village of Kawauchi within 20 kilometers of the disaster-struck Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant on Oct. 1, setting most parts of the municipality free of restrictions.

The lifting of the evacuation order will almost set the stage for Kawauchi, the first local government that declared its administration will "return home" after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, to make good on the plan 3 1/2 years after its evacuation. But residents of the village remain wary.

Kawauchi will be the second municipality within 20 kilometers of the crippled nuclear power station to have its evacuation order rescinded after the lifting in April of an evacuation order for the Miyakoji district of Tamura, its neighboring city to the north.

The population of Kawauchi is about 2,800. People have been allowed to live in the western part of the village, which is located at least 20 kilometers away from the nuclear power plant, since its designation as an emergency evacuation preparation zone was lifted six months after the outbreak of the disaster.

According to the Kawauchi Municipal Government, about half of Kawauchi residents have moved the basis of their livelihoods to the village. With the planned lifting of the evacuation order, the designation of the eastern part of the village within 20 kilometers of the nuclear plant as an "emergency evacuation

preparation zone" will be lifted, making it possible for 139 households, or 275 residents, to return to live there. An area of 54 residents in 18 households in the eastern part of the village will be reclassified as an evacuation preparation zone from a "residence restriction zone."

Seishu Ono, 53, whose house sits within 20 kilometers of the nuclear power plant, has been taking shelter in a rental housing unit provided by the Fukushima Prefectural Government in the Fukushima prefecture city of Iwaki. His 3-year-old son, Masahiro, who was born after the nuclear disaster, has never been to his father's hometown. "The Kawauchi of old was surrounded by nature and the elderly men and women of the village watched over children. It was the best place for raising children, but it is different now," said Ono.

An incineration facility for contaminated waste is scheduled to be built near Ono's house, and there are also multiple storing facilities nearby for contaminated soil which was produced in the process of decontamination. The term of his rental housing unit will expire in March 2016, but Ono plans to find a new job in Iwaki as he lost his employment in the wake of the nuclear disaster, as well as find a day-care center for Masahiro in the same city and continue to live there.

Genzaburo Owada, 79, and his 77-year-old wife Roku restarted their life at their old home in a zone within 20 kilometers of the crippled nuclear power station in June. "With our house right before our eyes, we couldn't just abandon our hometown," said Genzaburo. But they are still reluctant to relinquish their temporary housing unit where they took shelter in the western part of the village. That's because before the disaster, Genzaburo used to stop by a supermarket in Futaba near the nuclear power station on his way home from work. But today, they can rely only on a mobile store that visits the temporary housing complex twice a week. Genzaburo said, "Young people will not come back because it has become inconvenient. Someday, Kawauchi will really disappear."

Some residents are opting to stay in a temporary housing complex in the Fukushima prefecture city of Koriyama where many Kawauchi villagers live. A 46-year-old woman returned to a temporary housing unit after going back to the village and suffering a brain hemorrhage there. She now commutes to a hospital in Koriyama once a week for outpatient treatment. "Before the nuclear accident, there were hospitals equipped with facilities for inpatients and emergency care in the towns of Tomioka and Okuma. ... But now there is only a clinic in the village," she said, while rubbing her still-paralyzed left arm.

Chika Akimoto, 12, is the lone sixth-grader at Kawauchi Elementary School, the only elementary school in the village. In the summer of 2013 her classmate who evacuated outside of Fukushima Prefecture said, "I want to return to Kawauchi, but my father and mother say 'no.'" Chika decided to accept the fact that children must listen to what adults say. According to the elementary school, the number of its students dropped to 28 from the pre-disaster total of 114. No additional students are expected to return to the school in October when the evacuation order is lifted, the school says.

The central government says that it is not "compulsory" for local residents to return to the village. But 100,000-yen monthly compensation payments for psychological distress will be terminated one year after the lifting of the evacuation order. Atsushi Shida, who heads a non-profit organization that supports residents in temporary housing in Koriyama, said, "Kawauchi village used to depend on coastal towns for education and medical services. I wonder if its former residents can really live there now even if they are urged to return to the village, with the coastal areas yet to be rebuilt."

Upcoming briefings may be "rough"

September 29, 2014

Landowners briefed on Fukushima waste storage plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140930_10.html

Sep. 30, 2014 - Updated 04:09 UTC+2

Landowners near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant have voiced frustration at the government's plan to buy up their properties to build intermediate storage facilities for radioactive soil and other waste.

About 150 people took part in an Environment Ministry briefing on Monday. It was the first in a series of sessions aimed at outlining compensation plans for landowners in Futaba and Okuma towns.

The move comes as the Fukushima prefectural government earlier accepted construction of storage facilities in the 2 towns.

Ministry officials said they plan to purchase land at around half of its value before the nuclear accident. The officials said compensation for housing would depend on the age of buildings. They said landowners who decline to sell but allow usage of their plots would be paid 70 percent of the purchase price.

They said the prefecture would effectively cover the difference between the properties' pre-disaster value and the amount of compensation.

Many landowners expressed their reservations.

A man from Futaba Town said the offered price fell short of what he expected, and that the officials spoke about the possibility of forcibly buying up land. He predicted that upcoming briefings would be rough.

A woman from Okuma Town said government officials seemed to care little about the feelings of people who will be deprived of their land.

The government wants to win landowners' understanding, and start shipping contaminated waste to the storage facilities **in January**.

What is a hospital "designated" to treat radiation?

September 29, 2014

Hospitals nominally designated for radiation treatment double from 2011

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/29/national/science-health/japan-more-than-doubles-the-number-of-hospitals-designated-as-radiation-treatment-centers/#.VCkUkBanp1s>

The number of hospitals locally "designated" to treat radiation exposure has grown to 201 from 83 before the Fukushima nuclear disaster, a survey says.

But the survey, conducted by Kyodo News, also showed that the so-called designated hospitals, as of August, were **still struggling with shortages of skilled personnel and equipment as central government pushes to restart dozens of idled reactors, many of them old.**

The hospitals were designated by local governments as medical institutions that will provide emergency treatment for radiation exposure if nuclear accidents occur. **But there are no requirements for receiving the designation — including number of doctors specialized in radiation treatment.** This step was advised through a report compiled by the now-defunct Nuclear Safety Commission after the deadly 1999 criticality accident at a uranium-processing plant in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture. The Nuclear Regulation Authority is reviewing medical preparedness for nuclear disasters as part of a package of initiatives introduced in response to the Fukushima nuclear disaster but has not hammered out any specifics. The survey was conducted from July to September, 15 years after the criticality accident at JCO Co. in Tokai on Sept. 30, 1999, which killed two people. Responses were received from all 24 prefectural governments selected for their proximity to nuclear facilities.

Kawauchi : Evacuation order lifted

October 1, 2014

Evacuation advisory lifted for part of Fukushima village of Kawauchi

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/01/national/radiation-evacuation-advisory-lifted-part-fukushima-village-kawauchi/#.VCvidhanp1s>

JJI

KAWAUCHI, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – The government lifted its evacuation advisory Wednesday for the eastern part of Kawauchi, which is located within 20 km of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The eastern Kawauchi area became the second place to see the advisory lifted in the former no-go zone set up in Fukushima Prefecture after the start of the triple meltdown at the Tepco power plant, triggered by the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. The advisory for the Miyakoji district of Tamura, in the same prefecture, was removed in April.

The restricted residential area in Kawauchi was also realigned as a zone preparing for the evacuation advisory to be lifted.

About 275 residents from 139 families will be affected by the advisory's lifting, while the zone realignment will affect 54 residents from 18 families, according to data as of June 1.

Only those who have been temporarily living in their own houses under a long-stay program for the preparation zone are expected to make a swift return. The number of such people totaled 48, from 22 families, as of Thursday. The other residents would likely refrain from returning home soon, partly because living conditions remain difficult.

The central government and the municipal government of Kawauchi plan to invite supermarket operators to open stores by the end of next March.

In April 2012, the eastern Kawauchi area, which had been part of the no-go zone within a 20-km radius of the crippled nuclear plant, was realigned into preparation and restricted residential zones, depending on radiation levels.

In both zones, displaced residents were allowed to visit their homes during the daytime. But on April 26 of this year, residents in the preparation zone were allowed to stay there for three months, which the government attributed to progress in decontamination work.

Evacuation order lifted in Fukushima village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141001_13.html

Oct. 1, 2014 - Updated 02:58 UTC+2

The Japanese government has lifted an evacuation order for part of Kawauchi Village near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The measure -- for the eastern part of the village in Fukushima Prefecture -- took effect on Wednesday at midnight. It affects 274 residents in 139 households.

The government says decontamination has been completed in the area. The roads and other infrastructure have been rebuilt, and utility services are up and running.

This is the second time an evacuation order has been lifted since the 2011 accident, after the Miyakoji district in Tamura City in April.

Residents can now stay in their homes and reopen restaurants or other businesses.

But some have expressed concern that a drop in radiation levels is not sufficient for a return to their former lives. Others complain that shopping and medical services are inconvenient.

Because of this, not all former residents are expected to return to the village.

Also on Wednesday, the government re-designated some areas of the village where overnight stays had been prohibited as zones preparing for the return of residents.

An evacuation order is still in place for 10 municipalities around the Daiichi plant more than 3 and a half years after the accident, affecting some 80,000 people. Entry or overnight stays are limited in some areas.

The government has designated evacuation zones in 3 categories according to radiation levels. Evacuation orders are to be lifted after decontamination is complete.

Consumers more reluctant to buy Fukushima produce

October 2, 2014

Consumers suddenly more wary of produce from Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201410020033>

By KENJIRO TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

Consumers are more reluctant than ever to buy products from Fukushima Prefecture, even though more than three years have passed since the nuclear disaster.

The uptick in fears was seen in the government's latest poll on consumer consciousness and radiation in food. However, some are pointing the finger at a gourmet manga series.

The fourth biannual survey covered 5,176 people between the ages of 20 and 69 living in prefectures of the Tohoku region hit hardest by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011, as well as urban areas around Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya.

The Consumer Affairs Agency conducted the survey online in August. The results were published Oct. 1. According to the survey, 19.6 percent of the respondents said they were reluctant to purchase items produced in Fukushima Prefecture, home to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. This marked a 4-percentage-point increase from the 15.3 percent who answered the same in the February survey, and an all-time high since the surveys began.

In the August 2013 survey, 17.9 percent of the respondents said they were cautious about purchasing food from the prefecture, while 19.4 said the same in the February 2013 poll.

Some observers point to a serial manga as a possible reason for the rise in consumers' concerns about Fukushima food.

"We haven't been able to sufficiently analyze the results, but there were debates and media coverage on an incident involving the manga 'Oishinbo' just a few months ago," said Kumiko Bando, the agency's secretary-general. "This may have affected the results."

The incident refers to the publication of controversial episodes in the long-running food manga series in the weekly Big Comic Spirits magazine.

In the April 28 and May 12 installments of the comic, the main characters were shown developing nosebleeds after visiting the Fukushima plant, stirring up public debates that extended to the Fukushima prefectural government and the Cabinet.

In the latest poll, 70 percent of the respondents said they "do care" or "tend to care" where their food is produced, a 4-point increase from February.

Among those who said they cared, 24.7 percent gave "Because I want to buy food that doesn't contain radioactive substances" as the reason, up 4 points from the previous poll.

Surviving disaster takes imagination

October 9, 2014

Disaster-hit communities in Tohoku using local specialties to survive

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201410090005>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Like many other local communities around Japan, towns in the Tohoku region have tried to brand their specialty products to promote sales.

Three and a half years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami crushed those industries, the northeastern communities have resumed their brand image efforts--but now with the survival of communities at stake.

In early September at the Koishihama fishing port in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, fishing boats hauled in large catches of Koishihama Hotate, a scallop raised artificially in Okirai Bay.

The scallops, farmed where the Oyashio (Chishima) and Kuroshio (Japan) currents meet, are known for their thick, tough texture and sweet flavor.

The Koishihama community started scallop aquaculture about half a century ago.

To broaden the market, the fishing cooperative in 2008 branded the scallops Koishihama Hotate, replacing two kanji characters with the phonetic reading “koishi” (pebble) with different characters having the same reading but meaning “beloved.”

The Sanriku Railway also adopted the alternate kanji for the name of Koishihama Station. The station’s waiting room contains a plethora of votive-offering tablets made from scallop shells that people have hung up to pray for fulfillment in love.

On March 11, 2011, the tsunami swept away the young scallops and the rafts at the farms. Only two of the 40 boats survived.

Ryoetsu Matsukawa, a 62-year-old member of the fishing cooperative, fled from the coast in his boat. “When the tsunami receded and I returned to the port, there was nothing left,” he recalled.

Sixteen of the 17 scallop-farming families have resumed their work with young scallops ordered from Hokkaido. The remaining one decided to retire because of advanced age.

In September 2012, they shipped their first products since the earthquake. The Koishihama Hotate Teriyaki Bento, a popular boxed lunch, has also made a comeback.

The Sanriku Railway fully reopened in April. Passengers on a special train are served scallops at the station.

“If we didn’t have the scallops, the young people would be gone,” Matsukawa said. “Our community is vibrant because of the scallops.”

The Momonoura fishing port in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, is also banking on marine products for survival.

Momonoura was already facing an aging population and difficulty in finding successors to family businesses when the 2011 tsunami washed away 65 of the community’s homes and the majority of its aquaculture facilities.

Fifteen local fishermen set up a limited liability company in August 2012 to create jobs and attract workers.

Working with a trading firm in Sendai that specializes in fisheries, the fishermen are attempting to achieve year-round shipping and high quality under the brand name Momonoura-san Kaki (Oysters made in Momonoura).

They ship their products to such buyers as nationwide chains of major supermarkets and restaurants.

“If we can brand our product, then the fishermen will be motivated and also help us revive (the local economy),” said Katsuyuki Oyama, a 67-year-old representative of the company.

Farmers in Fukushima Prefecture have a different hurdle to overcome: The rumors about radiation that have hurt their reputation.

The prefecture is placing hopes on reviving the original Tennotsubu variety of locally-grown rice.

The Fukushima Agricultural Technology Center spent 15 years developing the strain and released it in fiscal 2011.

The plant itself is sturdier and more difficult to knock over. It can also grow easily even in fields that have lain fallow since the triple meltdown at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The release of radioactive substances in the disaster led to planting restrictions and voluntary bans in the prefecture. The area of rice fields in Fukushima in 2011 fell from the fourth-largest in Japan the previous year to seventh.

Municipalities in the Hamadori area along the coast and the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives are presenting Tennotsubu as a “symbol of reconstruction” and giving priority to planting the rice variety in reopened fields.

The town of Inawashiro in the prefecture created its own production standards, starting with last year's harvest. It is selling the rice under the name Inawashiro Tennotsubu.

"We want people to remember that Tennotsubu is made in Inawashiro, just like they know that Koshihikari is grown in Uonuma, Niigata Prefecture," a town official said.

Adopt a Fukushima pet

October 9, 2014

Group to start 'adoption' parties for abandoned pets in Fukushima Prefecture

October 09, 2014

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201410090001

By TAKURO NEGISHI/ Staff Writer

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Abandoned pets that were left behind when their owners evacuated after the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant will soon be the guests of honor at a monthly party by a local volunteer group.

The group, Lysta, which was set up in September 2011, plans to hold the first adoption party on Oct. 12 in hopes of finding "foster parents" for the animals.

Lysta is currently keeping 11 dogs and 70 cats, including those that were born after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis. Of the 81 animals, two-thirds were taken in near the No. 1 nuclear plant.

"I want both pet dogs and cats and foster parents to become happy," said Rie Suzuki, the group's representative.

Before the nuclear accident, Suzuki had been engaged in accepting abandoned cats from public health centers and looking for new owners for them.

After the evacuation, she learned that volunteers from other prefectures were caring for pet dogs and cats that were left behind in no-entry zones in a radius of 20 kilometers from the No. 1 nuclear plant.

Suzuki quit her job as a sales staff member in trains and began a solo effort to care for pets that were struggling to survive in the no-entry zones.

When residents were allowed to temporarily return to their houses in the no-entry zones, Suzuki followed them and placed their pet animals under her care. She also constructed a warehouse and doghouses near her home to house them.

Over three years, she returned four pet animals to their former owners and found new owners for 70 others. At present, about 40 volunteers as well as two paid staff members are supporting her activities.

With the passing of three and a half years since the nuclear accident, many abandoned pets have remained in Suzuki's facilities, such as a mixed-breed dog named Ai.

When the animal was rounded up in the Odaka district of Minami-Soma two years ago, it was extremely thin and its coat was ragged due to a skin disease. Now, however, the dog has become healthy.

A cat that was placed under protection in Futaba two and a half years ago was extremely wary of humans. It was named Gian, a character in the popular Japanese manga "Doraemon." However, the cat later became more receptive to human care. So Suzuki began to call it Nobita, another character of the manga.

Lysta is covering the medical expenses, utility charges and gasoline fees with donations collected through its website and other means. However, its finances are tight as the number of animals the group is taking care of has increased.

In addition, the group wants to free the pet dogs and cats from its temporary facilities and give them new homes.

The first party is scheduled to be held in the Iwaki-shi Onahama-chiku Fukko-shien Volunteer Center (Iwaki city, Onahama district, Reconstruction-support Volunteer Center) from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Three dogs and 20 cats will be taken there.

Staff members of Lysta will check whether those who want to adopt the animals can offer them suitable living conditions. The parties will continue on the second Sunday of every month.

For further details, Lysta can be contacted by e-mail at lystoanimals2011@gmail.com.

Rice harvested but not for use

October 7, 2014

Test rice harvested in Fukushima

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 7, 2014 - Updated 09:30 UTC+2

Rice grown on a trial basis in a restricted area in Fukushima prefecture has been harvested.

In May, Hitomebore brand rice was planted on a 25-are paddy in the town of Okuma to determine whether farming can resume, after the land was decontaminated.

On Tuesday, about 10 farmers and town officials carefully harvested the rice with sickles.

One of the farmers, Kanichi Hasegawa, said he has mixed feeling because they cannot eat the rice even after they harvest it. He added he hopes the test results will help the region recover.

Okuma town official Yoshiyuki Takeuchi said he hopes the outcome will help the residents take a step toward returning home.

The rice will be dried for about 2 weeks and then tested for radiation. It cannot be shipped or consumed and the entire crop will be thrown out.

About 800 hectares of rice was grown in Okuma town before the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. But all the residents have been relocated and no crops are grown in the town now.

Supertyphoon arriving

Vongfong, supertyphoon rivaling Haiyan, roaring toward Japan

AFP-JJI

- Oct 9, 2014

A supertyphoon on course to hit Japan over the weekend is as powerful as the deadly storm that ripped through the Philippines in 2013 killing thousands of people, meteorologists said Wednesday

he monstrous storm, named Vongfong, was picking up speed as it churned through the far west of the Pacific Ocean.

"Its strength is very much similar to Haiyan," which ravaged the Philippines in November, said a meteorologist at the Meteorological Agency.

Haiyan left nearly 8,000 people dead or missing when gusts of around 300 kph (190 mph) tore through the country, generating giant waves that swamped coastal communities.

Vongfong was registering gusts of the same strength, according to the Japanese agency.

Satellite images of Supertyphoon Vongfong show a perfectly formed eye in the middle of a gigantic swirling disc of cloud that appears to be sucking up weather systems from across the Tropics.

Its present course will see it smash into Japan some time over the weekend, just days after another typhoon whipped through the country, leaving 11 people dead or missing and causing travel chaos.

Vongfong is expected to continue strengthening over the next 24 hours but could lose some steam as it heads north.

"Normally, typhoons are strongest when they are in the Tropics. They start to gradually weaken as they move into the subtropical region and the temperate zone," the meteorologist said.

Fukushima's pets

October 13, 2014

Bittersweet embrace for Fukushima evacuees and their pets

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201410130027>

By YOSUKE FUKUDOME/ Staff Writer

IITATE, Fukushima Prefecture--A couple who have been living as evacuees since the 2011 disaster enjoyed a brief respite during a reunion with their dogs after a six-month separation.

"We're happier being with our dogs than we are living just the two of us," said 76-year-old Mamoru Takano, who temporarily returned to his home in the Sekisawa district with his wife on Oct. 12 to see their beloved animals.

The dogs were among 13 pets reunited that day with their owners by a Japan Animal Care Center facility in Tomika, Gifu Prefecture. The center took in dogs from owners forced to evacuate in the wake of the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and were unable to take care of their pets due to restrictions imposed by their housing situation.

"When the evacuation order is lifted, we look forward to living with our dogs again," Takano added.

After the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, the village was designated as an evacuation zone. Former residents of the Sekisawa district of the village, about 40 kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, are currently allowed to enter temporarily but not stay overnight.

The designation forced Mamoru and his wife Yayoi, 74, to take refuge in temporary housing in Soma in the prefecture.

The couple's dogs, Yamato and Koharu, wasted no time getting reacquainted, leaping for joy when they saw their owners.

The Tomika facility currently looks after 21 dogs. An official with the center said staff members traveled between Tomika and Iitate for similar reunion occasions in spring and autumn since 2013.

Extend the leasing contracts?

October 13, 2014

Contracts for interim radioactive waste storage sites in Fukushima due to expire

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141013p2a00m0na005000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Property leases for many interim radioactive waste storage facilities in Fukushima Prefecture are set to expire starting this month, a Mainichi Shimbun survey of local municipalities has found.

A total of 46 out of 47 municipalities in the prefecture subject to Fukushima nuclear disaster decontamination work responded to the Mainichi survey request, sent out in August this year. According to the results, as of the end of July, there were 859 temporary storage sites in 40 of the municipalities, holding some 3,194,688 cubic meters of radioactive soil and other contaminated waste from the disaster cleanup.

A government plan drawn up in October 2011 stated these sites would be closed in roughly three years. Accordingly, the central and local governments leased properties for many of the facilities for a three-year term. The leases for lands hosting 105 facilities storing 178,192 cubic meters of waste will reach their third year by the end of January 2015 -- shrinking storage capacity even as the volume of waste increases as decontamination work continues.

While the Fukushima governor in September agreed that the towns of Okuma and Futaba would host mid-term contaminated waste disposal sites, a timetable for moving the waste from the current temporary facilities to mid-term storage sites has not been set. **The Environment Ministry has begun requesting land owners of 64 temporary facilities that are being managed directly by the national government to extend their contracts.**

The town of Kawamata, whose nine interim storage sites will reach the three-year mark by January 2015, is set to demand that the national government remove the waste within the agreed time period.

Meanwhile, the Kawauchi municipal government has asked the central government to take responsibility for any storage site lease extensions and explain the situation to residents.

October 13, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

A sense of community

October 14, 2014

New facility in Saitama gives nuclear evacuees from Fukushima town a sense of community

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141014p2a00m0na004000c.html>

October 14, 2014

SAITAMA -- A new facility here is helping maintain community ties between displaced residents from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma, who evacuated from the town after the Fukushima nuclear plant meltdowns in 2011.

Most areas of Okuma have been designated as "difficult-to-return" zones due to high levels of radioactive contamination from the crippled nuclear power plant nearby. Roughly 1,800 of some 11,000 Okuma residents now reside in the Kanto region, including in Tokyo and Saitama prefectures.

The new community facility, named "Nashi no mi space," opened in July this year. The place was named after pear ("nashi" in Japanese) -- the town's local specialty. It serves as a meeting space for staff

members, as well as a venue for picture-story shows, but workers hope to turn the place into a base for keeping Okuma community ties alive.

With the help of central government subsidies, three staff members -- Michiko Hoshikawa, Isamitsu Tsuchida and Makiko Muta -- were hired by the Okuma Municipal Government this year as disaster recovery supporters in charge of checking up on evacuees from the town and keeping the local community alive.

Hoshikawa herself is an evacuee from Okuma. She moved to her husband's company-owned house in southern Saitama after the 2011 disaster and now lives there with him and their daughter. Her elderly parents, who lived near the family's home in Okuma, have moved to the Fukushima prefecture city of Iwaki, and Hoshikawa now rarely sees them. Her heart breaks whenever she hears those who have fled from their hometown being referred to as "voluntary evacuees."

"We are all under the same circumstances in a sense that we were all forced to evacuate," Hoshikawa said. When she talks to her fellow townspeople, Hoshikawa switches to her local dialect. "I am the one who is being encouraged," she says.

Muta says, "I am learning about community ties through Ms. Hoshikawa. She communicates with Okuma residents from a local's perspective."

The staff members visit Okuma evacuees who are scattered across the Kanto region to provide psychological care by listening to their stories. Sometimes they see evacuees who have started a new chapter in their lives, and at other times come across those who are irritated by how they have been treated after the disaster.

Although it has been 3 1/2 years since the disaster, the trio believes there's something they can do to help build a community precisely because of the time that has passed.

October 14, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

End of briefings on waste storage

Briefing on Fukushima waste storage plan completed

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141014_14.html

Oct. 14, 2014 - Updated 05:20 UTC+2

The Japanese government has completed a series of briefings on its plan to build intermediate storage facilities in Fukushima Prefecture.

The government plans to buy up land in Futaba and Okuma Towns that host the destroyed Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to house facilities to store radioactive soil and other waste.

The series of 12 sessions for landowners in the 2 towns began in September after the Fukushima prefectural government accepted the construction of the storage facilities.

About 240 people took part in the final session held behind closed doors in Iwaki City on Sunday.

Participants said Environment Ministry officials gave them an outline of compensation plans for their land.

Some of them complained about the offered price, saying it's not enough to rebuild their lives elsewhere. But the officials said it's hard to revise the planned purchase prices.

Some participants said the officials seemed to care little about the feelings of those who will lose their land.

The government wants to win the understanding of the landowners, and start shipping contaminated waste to the storage facilities in January.

Household power bills to increase

October 14, 2014

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/14/business/corporate-business/hokkaido-electric-wins-government-ok-to-raise-rates/#.VDzYSxanrIU>

Hokkaido Electric wins government OK to raise rates

Kyodo

The government on Tuesday approved Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s plan to raise household electricity bills by 15.3 percent on average, with the surge in fossil fuel costs weighing on the utility's business in the absence of nuclear power generation following the 2011 Fukushima crisis

Hokkaido Electric increased bills for households by 7.7 percent on average last year. For this hike, it initially sought a 17.03 percent increase, but the industry ministry said that was too much.

Prices are expected to be marked up 12.4 percent for five months from Nov. 1 through next March and 15.3 percent starting next April. The lower markup through March is designed to ease the negative impact on households in view of high electricity demand amid the long and cold Hokkaido winter.

Hokkaido Electric will be the first among major utilities to implement a second electricity bill hike since the 2011 disasters, which has kept the country's nuclear reactors from restarting due to safety concerns.

The regional utility owns three reactors at its Tomari nuclear power plant, but none have been online since the No. 3 unit was taken offline for a mandatory regular checkup in May 2012.

Hokkaido Electric claims it will lower electricity bills when it can reactivate the Tomari plant. It seeks to bring the reactors back online by March 2016, but the outlook is uncertain as they have yet to pass the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety screenings.

Economic and fiscal policy minister Akira Amari told a news conference that if other utilities also seek to raise their rates, it should be allowed only on condition that prices be reduced once nuclear power plants go back online.

For corporate users, the regional utility plans to raise electricity bills by 20.3 percent, a move which does not require government approval, following an 11 percent increase implemented last year.

More evacuees won't return

October 17, 2014

Survey: More Fukushima evacuees give up returning

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 17, 2014 - Updated 12:31 UTC+2

A survey shows more evacuees from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident have given up returning home.

The Reconstruction Agency and local municipalities released on Friday the results of the annual survey conducted in August.

Almost half of respondents from 2 towns designated as an evacuation zone said they decided they will not go back.

The percentage of people who gave this answer is up 11 points from last year in the town of Namie and up 3 points in Tomioka town.

Officials say some of the people who were undecided in last year's survey have made up their mind.

In last year's survey, more than 60 percent of evacuees from 2 towns near the damaged plant, Okuma and Futaba, said they will not return.

The agency says it will consult with local governments to incorporate the survey results in a reconstruction plan.

Additional decontamination in Kawauchi

October 17, 2014

Additional cleanup starts in a Fukushima village

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141017_29.html

Oct. 17, 2014 - Updated 11:08 UTC+2

The government has begun additional decontamination work in a village in Fukushima Prefecture **where an evacuation order linked to the nuclear accident was lifted this month.**

The work is intended to have former residents feel it's safe to return to the district in Kawauchi Village near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Some residents are hesitant about returning due to radiation worries, even after the government said the area has been cleaned up and lifted its order on October 1st.

Government contractors began the additional decontamination work this week. On Friday, they removed soil at 2 still-vacant houses.

Workers reported that radiation readings dropped by more than 90 percent from 2.89 micro-sieverts per hour near the ground just outside a barn at one of the houses.

Contractors are due to decontaminate 23 locations by the end of October. Government officials say not all houses will be subject to the additional work, and that the cleanup will be conducted as needed.

An additional round of decontamination was earlier launched in part of the Miyakoji district in Tamura City in the same prefecture, but not on as large a scale as in Kawauchi Village.

The evacuation order for Miyakoji was lifted in April. The order remains in place for 9 other communities in Fukushima Prefecture.

Inspiring blog from cancer patient

October 19, 2014

Former Fukushima teacher blogs to inspire students while fighting off cancer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/19/national/former-fukushima-teacher-blogs-to-inspire-students-while-fighting-off-cancer/#.VEVbHxanp1v>

The former vice principal of a junior high school in Fukushima Prefecture has been encouraging his former students by blogging while undergoing 11 years of treatment for cancer.

Yuki Sanbonsugi, 55, who fled to Koriyama after his hometown, Futaba, was evacuated to escape the radiation from the core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, became a junior high school teacher in 1981, after graduating from Senshu University.

He has taught classes in Iitate, Iwaki, Minamisoma, Katsurao, Namie and Tomioka — villages, towns and cities all close to the No. 1 power plant.

Eleven years ago, when he was vice principal of Tomioka Dai-ichi Junior High School, he was diagnosed with malignant lymphoma, a form of blood cancer, and decided to quit to concentrate on treatment.

Although he could not return to teaching, he gave lectures at schools and community centers to convey his thoughts on the importance of life.

In March 2011, the nuclear crisis forced Sanbonsugi to flee to several places in the prefecture, including the town of Furudono and the cities of Aizuwakamatsu and Koriyama, and even to Hokkaido.

Despite his hardships, he kept thinking about all the students he had taught. He was worried they might be in the throes of despair with their futures still unclear 3½ years into the nuclear crisis, or on the verge of giving up on returning to their hometowns.

“I want to support former students who are living as evacuees as much as I can,” said Sanbonsugi, who avidly updates his blog.

“Rather than grieving over what you cannot do, just simply do something you can do. Then, quietly wait for spring to come,” he recently wrote.

Hidefumi Sanpei, 35, one of his former students, works for the Tomioka Municipal Government, which ordered a full evacuation in light of the Fukushima No. 1 meltdowns. As an official in charge of residential support, he helps evacuees deal with their worries and sometimes gets a tongue-lashing in the process. As an evacuee himself supporting a wife and two children in new surroundings, Sanpei often got fed up with the work and his longing for his hometown.

He said Sanbonsugi’s blog gives him the courage to move forward. One phrase he always keeps in mind is: “Under the same sky, each one of us is living life to the fullest.”

Natsumi Yoshida, 33, who was one of Sanbonsugi’s students at Katsurao Junior High School, now teaches at a special needs school attached to Fukushima University. When the village of Katsurao was forced to evacuate, her former classmates were scattered all over the country.

Yoshida said she hopes to convey to her students a message she read in Sanbonsugi's blog: "Planting seeds of kindness on the hearts of each and every one of us."

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Oct. 4.

Stop nukes immediately : 27% of Fukushima voters

October 20, 2014

ASAHI POLL: 27% of Fukushima voters want immediate end to nuclear power

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201410200030

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Twenty-seven percent of voters in Fukushima Prefecture, home to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, want Japan to immediately abolish nuclear energy, around double the national average, an Asahi Shimbun survey found.

About 55 percent of voters in the prefecture support a break away from nuclear power in the near future, according to the telephone survey conducted on Oct. 18-19.

The survey results showed anti-nuclear sentiment is higher in Fukushima Prefecture than in the rest of the country.

Thirteen percent of voters in Tokyo supported the immediate abolition of nuclear energy in a survey in February, while 15 percent expressed the same opinion in a nationwide survey in January.

In those earlier surveys, 61 percent of Tokyoites and 62 percent of respondents nationwide said Japan should break away from nuclear power in the near future.

The latest survey covered 1,701 voters in Fukushima Prefecture and received 1,091 valid responses.

Only 15 percent of Fukushima voters said Japan should continue relying on nuclear energy, compared with 22 percent in the survey in Tokyo and 19 percent nationwide.

The survey also revealed that 66 percent of Fukushima voters accept Governor Yuhei Sato's decision to allow the construction of an interim facility to store radioactive waste from cleanup work in the prefecture.

Eighteen percent said they disagree with Sato's decision.

In addition, 53 percent said they support the central government's decision to end its policy of helping all evacuees from the nuclear disaster return to their homes and instead assist them in resettling elsewhere.

Twenty-eight percent were against the decision.

Up to 56 percent of respondents said they highly evaluate the governor's efforts to rebuild the prefecture from the damage caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, compared with 25 percent who said otherwise.

Forty percent of Fukushima voters said they support Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet, matching the 40 percent who did not support the Cabinet.

Nuclear Watch (NHK) : Inside No-entry Zone

NUCLEAR WATCH

Oct. 15, 2014

Inside No-entry zone

The nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi in 2011 caused a major dispersal of radioactive substances over many cities and villages around the plant. Three and a half years later, there are still many areas considered evacuation zones. Especially the highly contaminated "no-entry zones." Radiation exposure there exceeds 50 millisieverts a year. A level so high some evacuees face the prospect of never returning home. NHK WORLD's Ryo Asami has the story.

Akinori Shibata and his family once lived in Namie, a rural municipality not far from Fukushima Daiichi. The nuclear accident forced them to evacuate some 30 kilometers west to the city of Nihonmatsu, where they now live.

Shibata made a tough decision earlier this year. He gave up on the idea of returning to Namie, and decided to start a new life.

"This is my second hometown now. Over there is my real home, but we can't even enter that area."

Akinori Shibata

Still, Shibata is eager to follow the situation in Namie. So he's applied to enter the restricted zone with some radiation experts from Niigata University led by Professor Makoto Naito.

Since the nuclear accident, the group has been involved in regular surveys in Namie. They allowed me to follow them into the restricted area.



"We're right in front of the no-entry zone around Fukushima Daiichi. Access beyond this point is restricted. We need this two-day permit to get in."

Ryo Asami / Namie, Fukushima



According to Naito's research, average radiation levels went down in the no-entry zone. But they remain high in some areas.

Then we accompanied Shibata to his home. It's been about 6 months since he last visited. Shibata finds some belongings that have a special meaning for the family -- his children's school diplomas. I think making a quick decision was the right thing to do. I want my aging parents to enjoy the rest of their lives, and my children still have a future.

That's why I want to give them a normal life in a normal house."

Akinori Shibata

Many evacuees like the Shibatas are weighing a similar decision.

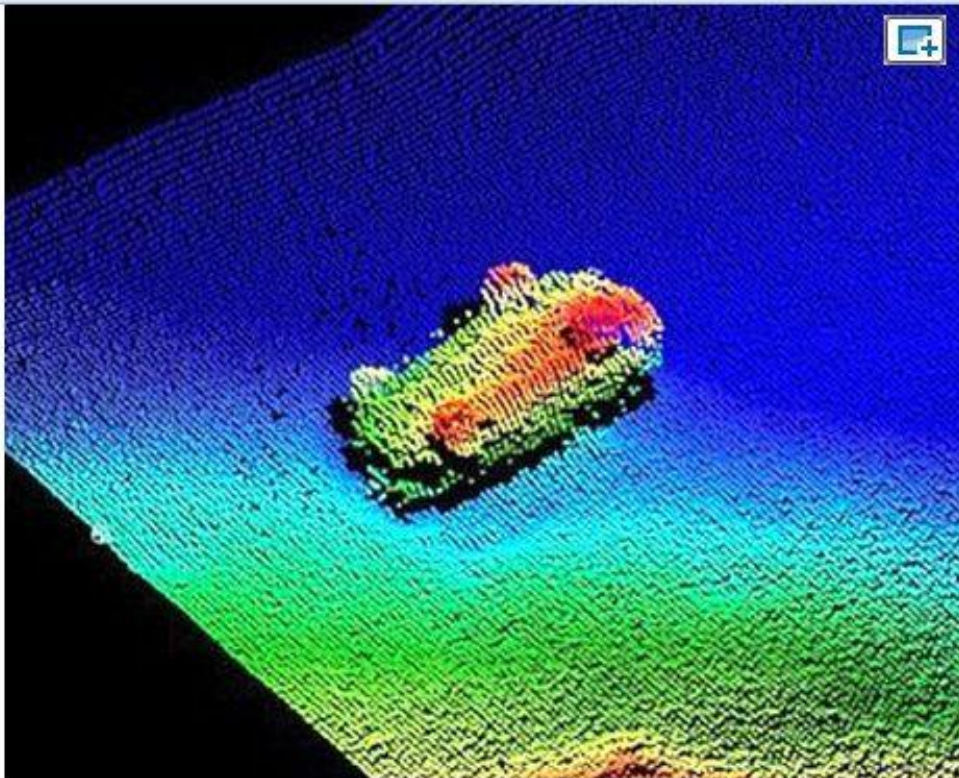
They're torn between the hope of going back one day and giving up entirely to make a clean start.

Revising nautical charts after tsunami

October 21, 2014

Nautical charts to be revised to reflect unprecedented changes caused by tsunami

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201410210001>



This image, obtained during the Tenyo's seabed survey immediately following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, is believed to represent a submerged vehicle. (Provided by the Second Regional Coast Guard Headquarters)

By YURI IMAMURA/ Staff Writer

ONAGAWA, Miyagi Prefecture--About an hour into a Japan Coast Guard hydrographic survey mission, a crew member on lookout abruptly shouted for the dinghy to stop.

The starboard was about to touch a 200-meter-long rope floating about 1 meter beneath the sea surface near Onagawa Port, Miyagi Prefecture.

The rope was being used for an underwater operation to tie a work vessel to a buoy. The previous day, the crew discovered about 10 caissons, the gigantic concrete boxes that constitute the foundations of a breakwater, in the area.

The boxes, measuring 20 meters per side and each weighing several thousand tons, were dumped there by the tsunami three and a half years ago.

“Even those hefty caissons were swept up by the tsunami,” said Tsuyoshi Takaesu, the chief hydrographic surveyor of the main Tenyo survey vessel. “You will never know what you will encounter.”

The Japan Coast Guard continues to survey waters off the tsunami-affected Tohoku coast to revise nautical charts that take into account disaster-related rubble on the seabed, drifting objects and changing water depths that could pose a threat to safe navigation.

The mission primarily covers 24 ports and surrounding waters along the Pacific coast extending from Aomori Prefecture to Ibaraki Prefecture and is scheduled to be completed by the end of fiscal 2015.

The 2011 disaster caused changes to the seafloor on an unprecedented scale, Coast Guard officials said.

And the mission so far has been full of surprises and potential dangers.

“A big mess would follow if (the rope) were to be caught in the dinghy’s propeller,” Takaesu said in a strained voice about the rope.

The dinghy’s crew approached carefully and used a pole to get the rope out of the way.

The compact dinghy, which is only 2 meters wide and 10 meters long, was deployed from the 430-ton Tenyo survey vessel on Sept. 17 to survey the shallow interior of the port.

The Tenyo, with a crew of 23 and Koichi Nishimura as captain, was surveying all parts of the harbor off the town of Onagawa for the first time in 32 years.

Takaesu, 50, has served in the post since immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake triggered the tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The tsunami changed water depths significantly in nautical charts in at least one location for every harbor, according to officials of the Second Regional Coast Guard Headquarters, which oversees the coasts of the six Tohoku prefectures.

Nautical charts show water depths, coastal topography, locations of shoals and lighthouses, ocean flows and tide currents to ensure safe navigation of seafaring vessels and port use.

The new nautical charts will be used to set limits on the size of vessels and their cargo to ensure that seabed objects will not hit the ship bottoms.

Takaesu recalled the time he was in Kamaishi Port in Iwate Prefecture in May, when he came across a spot with a depth of only 1 to 2 meters, despite surrounding depths of 36 meters. When he hastily brought out measurement equipment, he saw something in the water that looked like Tokyo Tower.

“What’s this?” he thought, and returned to the same spot. He realized the object was a mess of entangled fishing nets.

“It gave me a shudder to realize that an object like that was still moving along,” Takaesu said. “Rebuilding efforts have proceeded visibly on land, but they probably still have a long way to go in the ocean.”

The dinghy can accommodate 10, but only five or six usually go on board because of the small interior.

A monitoring chamber in the center of the dinghy contains four computer monitors. A multi-beam sonar on the bottom measures the seafloor topography and produces graphical output.

The constant movement of the dinghy can induce sea sickness.

“I have yet to get accustomed,” said Kenta Kobayashi, a 21-year-old rookie who was assigned to do hydrographic surveys in spring.

The dinghy shuttled back and forth at a speed of 8-9 kph within a radius of about 100 meters near a tsunami breakwater under construction 1 km off Onagawa Port. It shifted its trajectory slightly to one side each time, just as you do when you wipe a floor with a cloth.

“We are passing by the caissons,” Kobayashi said as the dinghy entered the waters where the objects had been spotted the previous day. When the depths became shallower, the computer screens shifted from deep blue to orange.

Koji Saito, a 25-year-old assistant hydrographic surveyor, said he was working for the Second Regional Coast Guard Headquarters in Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture, when the quake and tsunami struck. He said he found a swept-up passenger car in Hachinohe Port, Aomori Prefecture.

“Whenever I am on a survey mission, I can’t help but look for a car that may contain missing people,” Saito said.

Tsunami breakwaters were destroyed in the ports of Ofunato and Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture, where water depths lost a maximum of 10 meters. But in a July 2011 survey, the water was 15 meters deeper than indicated in the nautical chart at one location in Hachinohe Port, Aomori Prefecture. It is believed that the tsunami induced a big eddy that scooped out part of the seafloor.

Coast Guard officials said local governments that administer ports are in charge of surveying any small changes, such as those resulting from wharf construction. The Coast Guard uses those survey results to modify its nautical charts.

But the 2011 disaster created so many changes that the Coast Guard took the unusual step of conducting comprehensive surveys and republishing nautical charts for all 24 ports affected.

It takes workers two to eight weeks to survey a single harbor. They work in three shifts around the clock. Data analysis requires an additional six months to one year.

“There is a pressing need for port maintenance to help rebuilding efforts,” said Hirokazu Mori, the 47-year-old chief of the hydrographic surveys division in the Second Regional Coast Guard Headquarters. “We hope to produce highly reliable nautical charts.”

Japan’s first nautical chart was created in 1872 by the navy and covered Kamaishi Port. Vessels of a certain dimension are legally obligated to equip themselves with nautical charts on a permanent basis.

Arbitration on compensation

October 22, 2014

Evacuees call on TEPCO to accept settlement plans

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141022_27.html

Oct. 22, 2014 - Updated 10:57 UTC+2

Evacuees from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident have urged the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant to swiftly accept a state arbitration body's compensation proposals.

About 50 people, including evacuees who have filed for arbitration, gathered at a Diet building in Tokyo on Wednesday to press their requests.

The Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims made proposals this year to settle claims filed by groups of residents of Namie Town and Iitate Village, both in Fukushima Prefecture.

But Tokyo Electric Power Company has rejected the proposals, saying blanket compensation without

consideration for individual circumstances would not ensure equality.

Participants said they want a quick settlement as they have been forced to live away from their communities or family members for more than 3 years in the wake of the disaster.

A 67-year-old resident from Namie said evacuees suffered a variety of losses. He said compensation for their mental damage is far from sufficient and that the firm should honor the evacuees' claims.

Their lawyers said they will ask the government for a legal revision to oblige the utility to accept the arbitration center's proposals.

TEPCO demands compensation back

October 23, 2014

Woman urged to repay nuke disaster compensation after she enters college outside Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141023p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has demanded that a 21-year-old woman repay roughly 9 million yen of the 16 million yen in compensation she received over the Fukushima nuclear disaster, which left her family home in an off-limits zone, it has been learned.

TEPCO is demanding the woman return the amount she received after she entered a college outside Fukushima Prefecture and changed her residential address. The woman has resisted the demand.

"I have no prospects of being able to return home, and my psychological pain continues," she said.

TEPCO has not released concrete guidelines for compensation. It is feared that the finances of other nuclear evacuees could be thrown into disarray if TEPCO were to suddenly demand that they repay large amounts of compensation they have already received.

Under interim guidelines from the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, a body operating under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, people who are forced to evacuate from their homes for long periods are eligible for compensation for mental suffering.

TEPCO makes decisions on compensation based on the requests it receives.

The case of the 21-year-old woman marks the first time that TEPCO has demanded repayment of compensation from someone other than its own employees. Roughly 80,000 people are eligible for compensation for mental suffering, and it is possible the company's move could affect other evacuees who change their addresses when entering academic institutions, getting married or job transfers. The company is therefore likely to face calls to clarify its guidelines for compensation.

The family of the 21-year-old woman, who agreed to speak to the Mainichi Shimbun, said that in December 2010, when she was a third-year student at a high school in the Futaba district of Fukushima Prefecture, she was accepted into a three-year nursing college in the Kanto region. After the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March 2011, her family evacuated from one place to another within the prefecture. In early April that year, she started living by herself in an apartment near the college. She graduated this spring and started working at a hospital in the Kanto region.

When her family visited a TEPCO counter to discuss compensation in June this year, they explained how she had entered the college. Then in early September, a bill from TEPCO arrived. It stated that the amount she had received differed from what she was supposed to have been paid. TEPCO said that she had

decided to enter the college before the nuclear accident, and that her period of evacuation ended when she changed her address to attend college.

Specifically, TEPCO demanded that the woman repay the 7.3 million yen she had received for mental suffering (covering six years and one month worth of payments at 100,000 yen per month), in addition to 480,000 yen in compensation for her evacuation from the no-go zone, and about 1.28 million yen in compensation for household effects.

The woman had sought compensation from TEPCO for household effects because she had purchased new items, not having taken anything from her home after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. However, TEPCO asked her to repay the amount on the grounds that she had purchased the items in line with her entry into college.

The woman's family remains unhappy with TEPCO's demand.

"People from the zones where return has been deemed difficult are unable to return to their homes for a long time. She did enter college, she hasn't become financially independent, and her life as an evacuee hasn't finished. TEPCO hasn't publicly released its payment guidelines, and we can't agree with its decision," a family member said.

A representative of TEPCO's head office for Fukushima restoration told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We can't comment on individual cases, but decisions are not made on academic advancement alone. We will continue with compensation in the future while checking individual circumstances."

According to the Fukushima Prefecture Board of Education, roughly 1,000 high school students from evacuation zones graduated in the spring of 2011, as the woman did. If it turns out they decided to change their address to areas outside evacuation zones before the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, then they could face demands from the company to return their payments.

The education ministry's office on measures for compensation for nuclear damage takes the view that in general terms, if a person can't return home, then their period of evacuation does not end simply because of academic advancement. However, the nuclear damage response office within the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, has seen this as a borderline situation in determining whether or not compensation should be paid.

Earlier, when several TEPCO employees changed their address to locations outside the zones that were off-limits, the company judged that their period of evacuation had ended, and demanded that they repay compensation for mental anguish. The bill that one employee faced was in the range of millions of yen. There have been other cases in which TEPCO has cut off compensation payments. When a woman in her 30s married a man outside the evacuation zone in October 2011, TEPCO judged that the woman's livelihood had been established, and cut off her payments for mental suffering. The woman argued that her mental suffering had not ended, and filed for mediation through the central government's Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center. The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy informed TEPCO that it was not right to cut off compensation using marriage as a reason, and payments subsequently resumed.

October 23, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Fishing in Fukushima

Nuclear watch : Fishing in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141022_31.html

Fishermen in Fukushima are feeling the effects of the process of decommissioning the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. They've been forced to change the way they work. And there are still restrictions on what they can catch. In this edition of "Nuclear Watch," NHK WORLD's Daisuke Kamikubo looks at how fishermen are trying to rebuild their industry.

The port of Onahama in Iwaki City is 50 kilometers south of the Fukushima plant. Fish are brought to the port four times a week. Fishermen call it test fishing.

Right after the fish arrive, they're screened for radioactive cesium. At least one per species is tested from each section of the fishing grounds.

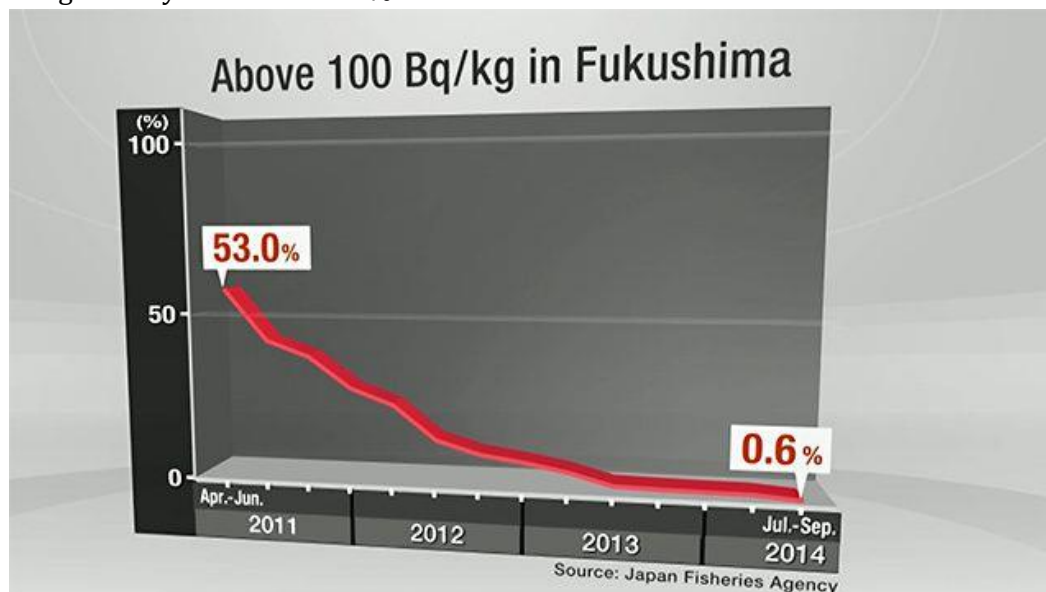
"We have a rocky road ahead. But we will display the spirit of fishermen."

Fisherman

Fish that are confirmed safe can be shipped to consumers throughout Japan. Following the disaster, government officials established the world's strictest standards for radiation exposure for fish.

A new limit on cesium - 100 becquerels / kg - was established.

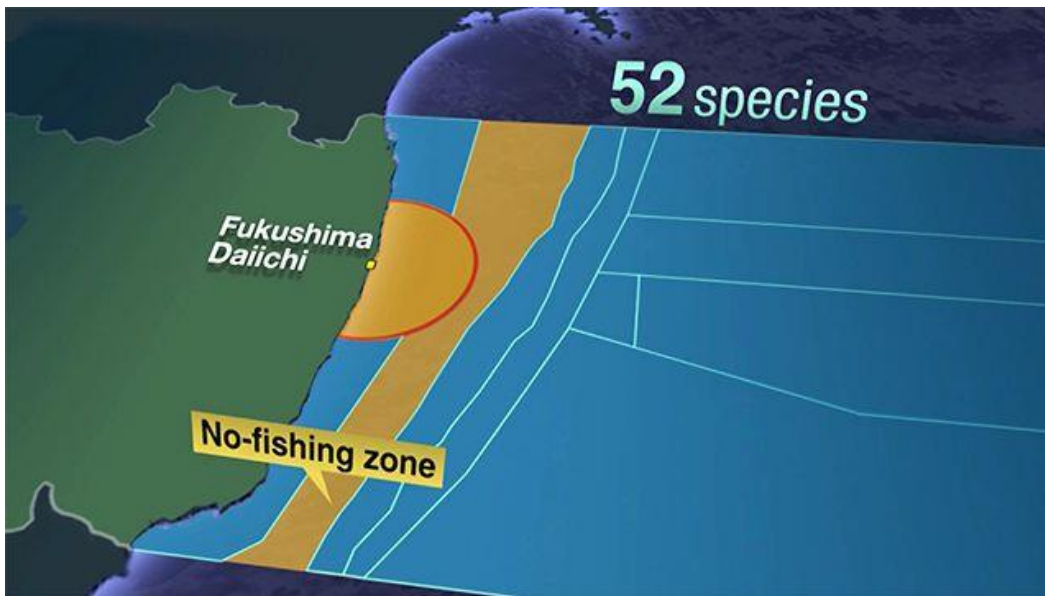
Right after the accident, 53% of fish caught in Fukushima were above the government ceiling. The number has gradually declined to 0.6%.



The Fukushima fisheries federation set an even stricter limit - 50 becquerels / kg.

All fishing in the area was halted after the accident. 15 months later, fishing for just 3 species resumed, 50 kilometers out to sea north of Fukushima.

The area has been gradually expanded. Now, fishing is allowed in almost all waters except those very close to the plant. Fishermen now catch 52 species, about one-fourth of what they could before the accident.



"We just have to go step by step. We have to go beyond making loud claims about the safety of fish from Fukushima. We should continue testing fish and prove they're safe, so consumers will eat them."

Tetsu Nozaki / Chairman, Fukushima fisheries federation

But fishermen have yet to resume full-scale operations. They're not allowed to catch some species including flounder, which was the main source of revenue for Fukushima fishermen. The total volume of the catch is still 1.5 percent of what it was before the disaster. Fishermen say test fishing is necessary to rebuild the industry.

"Fishermen want to be fully back in business. But they face yet another hardship...a planned release of contaminated water from Fukushima Daiichi. Plant operator TEPCO says there is no problem as radioactive substances have been removed from that water. But fishermen are not so sure."

Daisuke Kamikubo / Onahama, Fukushima

In August, TEPCO officials said they might discharge groundwater that had accumulated in wells dug around the plant's reactor buildings. They say the groundwater is contaminated, but will be processed before it's released into the sea.

And over 500,000 tons of radioactive water is stored in tanks. The operator says it will continue storing the water there. Local fishermen say they will never allow TEPCO to discharge the water into the sea. But they say they are not opposed to all of TEPCO's plans.



" We fishermen need to work hand in hand on decommissioning Fukushima Daiichi. We can't run away from the accident. If we wish to catch fish off Fukushima and sell them, we need consumers to know the fish are safe to eat."

Tetsu Nozaki / Chairman, Fukushima fisheries federation

TEPCO executives say the decommissioning will take up to 40 years. Fishermen are closely watching how the work proceeds.

Taiwan & food imports ban

October 27, 2014

Chiba governor asks Taiwan to lift import ban

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 27, 2014 - Updated 10:17 UTC+1

A governor from eastern Japan has called on Taiwan to lift its ban on imports of food and agricultural products from his prefecture. The ban was imposed in the aftermath of the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

Chiba Governor Kensaku Morita made the request to the head of Taiwan's liaison commission with Japan, Lee Chia-chin, in Taipei on Monday.

Fukushima and Chiba are among the 5 prefectures with food and agricultural products facing a blanket ban in Taiwan.

Morita told Lee that **products from Chiba are being screened for radioactive materials before shipment in line with state government standards.**

He requested that Taiwanese inspectors be dispatched to Chiba to see their inspection process.

Lee responded by saying he will pass on the request to relevant government offices. He said the government will immediately lift the ban should authorities give their consent.

He also said the issue will be taken up during a trade meeting between Japan and Taiwan, slated for November.

He added that a dispatch of Taiwanese inspectors will be the most convincing step to take.

New Governor in Fukushima Prefecture

October 27, 2014

Fukushima elects new governor in first election since 2011 disasters

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/27/national/politics-diplomacy/ex-vice-governor-likely-win-fukushima-gubernatorial-election/#.VE4k1xZ5B1s>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Former Fukushima Vice Gov. Masao Uchibori was elected governor in a landslide Sunday in the prefecture's first gubernatorial campaign since the 2011 natural and nuclear disasters.

Reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as nuclear policy were the main issues in the election involving around 1.6 million voters, but there was a lack of in-depth discussion as both ruling and opposition parties threw their support behind the 50-year-old Uchibori.

Asked Monday morning about priorities once he takes office, Uchibori said: "I want to rebuild the worst-hit parts of the evacuation zone, and then rebuild all of Fukushima (Prefecture). I'm reminding myself anew of the heavy responsibility. We must do whatever it takes to reconstruct Fukushima."

Uchibori has declined to comment on whether he believes reactors around the rest of the country should be reactivated. Therefore the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to face no challenge from him as it continues procedures to restart idled nuclear plants.

Furthermore, the ruling coalition of Abe's Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito managed to stave off defeat — which it suffered in the Shiga gubernatorial race in July.

The focus now shifts to the governor race next month in Okinawa, where issues related to U.S. military bases are likely to dominate.

Uchibori got 490,384 votes, while runner-up Yoshihiro Kumasaka received 129,455.

Kumasaka, 62, a former mayor of Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, had the backing of the Japanese Communist Party and Shinto Kaikaku (New Renaissance Party).

Fewer than 30,000 votes went to four other candidates.

Voter turnout was 45.85 percent, up 3.43 point from the previous election but the second lowest on record.

Uchibori ran nominally as an independent but was supported by the local chapters of the LDP and Komeito as well as the opposition Democratic Party of Japan and the Social Democratic Party.

"I will put my heart and soul into the reconstruction of Fukushima," said Uchibori, who will succeed outgoing Gov. Yuhei Sato. "I will first put my efforts into reconstructing evacuated areas and revitalizing the prefecture."

Sato, who served two four-year terms, said he wants his successor to be "someone who can carry out my will and continue reconstruction work, and who knows the prefecture very well."

During the campaign, Uchibori pledged to "make utmost efforts to bring recovery to Fukushima as early as possible." He underscored his readiness to serve as governor after having supported Sato as vice governor from 2006.

Uchibori resigned from the vice governorship last month to run in the election.

Although the number of candidates was a record high for the prefecture, all of them agreed that reactors in the prefecture should be decommissioned and pledged to reconstruct the region devastated by the March 2011 disasters.

While the other contenders opposed reactivating nuclear reactors in other parts of Japan, Uchibori refrained from expressing a view on the matter, apparently in deference to the central government.

The prefecture has already demanded that the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. decommission the four reactors at the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant in addition to the six at crippled Fukushima No. 1.

The other contenders were Katsutaka Idogawa, a 68-year-old former mayor of the town of Futaba, which hosts the Fukushima No. 1 plant, Yoshitaka Ikarashi, a 36-year-old pastor, Akiko Iseki, 59, a convenience store manager, and Yoshinao Kaneko, 58, president of a construction company.

Former vice governor takes Fukushima gubernatorial election in landslide

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201410270033

October 27, 2014

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Backed by four parties in both the ruling and opposition camps, former Fukushima Vice Governor Masao Uchibori was elected governor on Oct. 26 in **a campaign where the future of the nation's nuclear policy was placed on the back burner.**

It was Fukushima Prefecture's first gubernatorial election since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Uchibori was elected in a landslide victory over five other independent newcomers. He garnered 490,384 votes, more than three times as many as the runner-up.

With voter turnout at 45.85 percent, it was the second lowest turnout on record after the last gubernatorial election, where only 42.42 percent of eligible voters showed up at the polls.

There was little difference in the platforms of the six candidates, all of whom called for decommissioning all nuclear power plants in the prefecture. Other issues, such as the rebuilding of residents' lives and communities, failed to motivate voters as well.

Touting himself as the successor to Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato, Uchibori, 50, the outgoing governor's deputy for eight years, campaigned on a platform of succeeding and further promoting his policies.

As a result, the stay-the-course approach earned Uchibori broad support from not only supporters of major political parties but also local municipal leaders and industry organizations.

Backing Uchibori were the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, its junior coalition partner, New Komeito, the opposition Democratic Party of Japan and the Social Democratic Party.

The Abe administration, which hopes to restart many of the nuclear reactors across Japan that were taken offline in the aftermath of the Fukushima crisis, backed Uchibori, who was supported by the opposition parties. **The administration did so in order to prevent the issue on whether to phase out nuclear power from becoming a key point of contention.**

Uchibori's opponents included Yoshihiro Kumasaka, 62, a doctor who was supported by the Japanese Communist Party and the New Renaissance Party. He campaigned on abandoning nuclear power in and outside the prefecture. Also opposing Uchibori was Katsutaka Idogawa, 68, the former mayor of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture. Neither were able to garner wide support.

The world's attention is now on the new governor who has a mountain of issues to tackle related to the nuclear disaster in order to pave the way for the prefecture's recovery.

Don't move out evacuation zone to study

October 28, 2014

TEPCO guidelines say evacuees entering college not eligible for compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141028p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has set in-house standards for compensation that require evacuees who have moved out of evacuation zones to attend university or college to repay some of the compensation they have already received, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

A TEPCO document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun says that if a tenant agreement between an evacuee and a landlord had been signed before the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, it is considered that the decision to move was made before the disaster, and that their evacuation was over

after they moved into the new place. TEPCO is believed to use the guidelines when interviewing evacuees about requests for compensation.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education and other concerned parties, however, there are no universities or two-year colleges in areas that have been designated as evacuation zones, where residents are entitled to 100,000 yen in compensation monthly for their mental distress. It means that under the TEPCO standard, all evacuees who moved out of evacuation zones to enter university or college, regardless of the location of the institutions, will be subject to TEPCO's demand for repayment.

While TEPCO has not disclosed how many people are subject to such a rule, the prefectural education board said there were some 1,000 students in off-limits zones who graduated from high school in the spring of 2011.

A 21-year-old woman from a difficult-to-return zone, who is being urged to return some 9 million yen to TEPCO, was accepted into a three-year nursing college in the Kanto region in December 2010. She signed a rental contract for an apartment near the school in January 2011 and moved there in the beginning of April. In June this year, TEPCO requested the woman's family to send a copy of the rental contract to TEPCO's head office in Tokyo, and sent back a note in September with the amount of repayment the woman needs to pay, claiming that she ended her evacuation when she moved into the apartment. A representative of TEPCO's head office for Fukushima restoration told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We make decisions on compensation after checking individual circumstances," but added that the company cannot release payment guidelines.

Attorney Naoto Sasayama, who takes part in nuclear disaster compensation claims, said, "As disaster compensation is funded by the government, operation transparency and fair payment guidelines are indispensable. If TEPCO demands evacuees repay some of the compensation, the company needs to disclose the payment standards."

October 28, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Radioactive soil stored at schools not covered by law

October 29, 2014

Radioactive soil stored at Fukushima schools not covered by recent disposal law, has nowhere to go

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Radioactive soil currently stored at schools in Fukushima Prefecture is not supposed to be transferred to radioactive waste storage facilities planned to be built near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Jiji Press learned Tuesday.

because decontamination at schools was carried out before a special law on radioactive contamination took effect in January 2012 and thus the Environment Ministry deems tainted soil collected during the work not covered by the law. The central government undertakes or funds decontamination work.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government is arguing that such discrimination is pointless and has repeatedly called on the ministry to create a system that will allow soil contaminated with fallout from the March 2011 nuclear calamity at the power plant to be shipped from schools to the planned interim storage facilities.

“We want the state government to prepare an environment where children can study safely,” a senior Fukushima municipal official said.

But the ministry has not given a clear response. This reluctance may be partly due to concerns over the cost of shipping soil to the facilities to store tainted soil before being finally disposed of at other locations. The cost is to be borne eventually by the plant’s operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co.

A senior ministry official said it may be unfair to discriminate between radioactive soil collected before and after the law’s effectuation.

In August, the Fukushima Prefectural Government decided to accept the construction of the temporary storage facilities around the nuclear plant.

Hoping to begin radioactive waste shipments to the facilities in January, the central government is working to win the consent of landowners on the construction.

It wasn't us

November 1, 2014

NRA rebuts claim that Fukushima cleanup affected faraway rice paddies

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201411010037>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan's nuclear watchdog disputed the farm ministry's assertion that radioactive substances churned up by debris removal work at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant contaminated distant rice paddies last year.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority announced at a commissioners' meeting Oct. 31 its estimate that 110 billion becquerels of radioactive materials spread as a result of cleanup at the No. 3 reactor building on Aug. 19, 2013.

This figure is lower than the 130 billion to 260 billion becquerels estimated by the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., in August.

Radiation readings rose significantly during debris removal that day, with radioactive substances found to have contaminated plant workers about 500 meters from the reactor building.

However, NRA Commissioner Toyoshi Fuketa emphasized, "The affected area of the fallout was within the nuclear plant compound."

"While it is difficult to simulate the spread of radioactive substances (outside the plant), it is unlikely that the debris cleanup caused the contamination (of the rice paddies)," Fuketa said.

The nuclear facility was ravaged by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami, triggering a triple meltdown.

The NRA arrived at the figure of 110 billion becquerels by analyzing radiation levels recorded at monitoring posts north-northwest of the plant on the day in question.

Radioactive fallout on this scale constitutes a Level 0 incident on the International Atomic Energy Agency's International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale.

Earlier, the farm ministry pointed to the possibility that radiation from the plant had spread to rice paddies in Minami-Soma more than 20 kilometers away, and called on TEPCO to take preventive measures in its debris removal work.

During the NRA meeting, some experts noted that despite the NRA's estimate, it is unlikely that factors other than debris cleanup at the plant could have caused such high levels of radioactive fallout at the rice farms.

"From a broader perspective, the Fukushima No. 1 plant is responsible for the contamination," one participant said.

October 31, 2014

NRA: Fukushima debris didn't taint rice paddies

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 31, 2014 - Updated 11:27 UTC+1

A member of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority says it's highly unlikely that radioactive particles from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant contaminated rice fields some 20 kilometers away.

Commissioner Toyoshi Fuketa spoke at the authority's meeting on Friday. Radioactive substances were found in the paddies after workers removed debris from the plant's Number 3 reactor building in August last year.

The authority said the removal work released dust particles with 110 billion becquerels of radiation.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, said the particles had relatively large diameters of several micrometers.

Fuketa indicated that given the level of radiation, the particles had an environmental impact only in the plant compound. He suggested that the contamination may have come from river and ground water.

The authority is considering whether to make projections on how far radioactive particles will spread during debris removal and how they will affect rice fields.

Shika disaster drill (2)



November 3, 2014

Thousands take part in drill around Ishikawa nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/03/national/thousands-take-part-drill-held-ishikawa-prefecture-nuclear-power-plant/#.VFe6xMI5B1s>

During a nuclear evacuation drill held in the town of Shika, Ishikawa Prefecture, on Sunday, a man on a stretcher is carried out of a home for senior citizens. The two-day drill, which will end Monday, is being held on the assumption that the nearby Shika nuclear power plant, operated by Hokuriku Electric Power Co., finds it cannot cool its reactors after a strong earthquake hits the area. |

KYODO

JJI

Drills were held Sunday and Monday to respond to a severe accident at the Shika nuclear plant in Ishikawa Prefecture.

The drill assumed that Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s power plant had been hit at 8 a.m. Sunday by an earthquake measuring upper 6 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7, had lost its external power supply and was leaking radioactive material.

At 1:30 p.m. the government announced a nuclear state of emergency because water supplies to the plant had been cut and the reactors were no longer being cooled.

Government officials ordered residents within 5 km of the plant to evacuate and instructed them to take iodine tablets in advance to reduce the effects of radiation exposure. Residents within 30 km were ordered to stay indoors.

At a simulated meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that the government would act to prevent the accident from getting out of control and ensure people's safety.

Situation reports were submitted to the meeting in the prime minister's office through a teleconference system linking such places as the town and the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

This was the second drill of its kind since the March 2011 disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The government conducted the first one last year at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

No details regarding the scenario are told to participants in advance of the two-day drill to make the situation closer to the real thing.

Some 3,700 people took part, including about 1,000 residents near the plant and participants from a variety of government agencies, including the Cabinet Office, the NRA, the Defense Ministry and the National Police Agency.

Local governments in not only Ishikawa Prefecture but also Toyama Prefecture, which is within 30 km of the plant, also took part.

Reconnect dispersed evacuees

November 3, 2014

Fukushima town evacuees work to connect fellow displaced citizens

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141103p2a00m0na016000c.html>

On Oct. 18, reconstruction assistant Makie Tomikawa, 55, finished visiting 103 households spread across Japan, from the Kinki region to Hokuriku on the Sea of Japan. All these families were once part of the same community -- the town of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture -- before they were forced to flee by the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Tomikawa's goal: to help reconnect the dispersed residents.

The entire town of Namie -- some 20,000 people -- was evacuated following the March 2011 disaster, with some 6,000 leaving Fukushima Prefecture altogether.

Several of the areas hit by the disaster went on to hire reconstruction assistants to provide support to residents and help revitalize local communities. The town of Namie hired 30 such assistants, who have been entrusted with making personal visits to displaced Namie residents around the country.

At the time of the reactor meltdowns, Tomikawa was a temporary worker at a local community center. She evacuated to the city of Kyoto, where her son and daughter live. She was hired for the reconstruction assistance post in June 2013, after telling officials that she "wanted to do something to help benefit the townspeople who had become scattered (around the country)."

Tomikawa and 45-year-old Kyoto resident Emi Tsuchida -- hired at the same time -- were responsible for visiting 103 households (totaling 209 people) of evacuated Namie residents in the Kinki region, three of the Hokuriku region prefectures, as well as Okayama, Tottori and Kagawa prefectures. They were able to meet personally with some 70 percent of the Namie residents in their designated regions.

A man in his 60s who evacuated alone to Hyogo Prefecture told Tomikawa and Tsuchida dejectedly, "I came here because this is where I once lived 30 years ago, but even though I asked around, I was unable to find even one of my old friends." He added, however, "I was happy that people from Namie came to visit me."

A couple in their 60s who found shelter in Ishikawa Prefecture talked about their memories from Namie for around two hours, prompting their daughter, who lives with them, to comment, "I haven't seen them chatting so excitedly for a long time."

Tomikawa is also responsible for holding informational sessions in various locations, and sending handcrafted newsletters to displaced Namie residents. She commented, "Almost everyone says that they want to return to Namie someday."

November 03, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

16 sq km of storage site between Okuma and Futaba

November 4, 2014

Lower House approves Fukushima waste bill

Nov. 4, 2014 - Updated 10:15 UTC+1

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

The Lower House of Japan's Diet passed a bill on Tuesday governing the storage of radioactive waste in Fukushima. **It promises that the waste will be moved out of the prefecture within 30 years.**

The government plans to build intermediate storage facilities in the towns of Futaba and Okuma, near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The people in those towns have been demanding that the waste be disposed of outside the prefecture.

The bill obliges the government to ensure the waste is safely stored in the prefecture, and moved out within 30 years to a final disposal site. The bill provides for a state company handling disposal of PCBs to engage in the business of storing nuclear waste.

It also urges that the government study ways to reduce the concentration of radioactive substances in the soil, and develop recycling technologies before final disposal.

It now goes to the Upper House for final approval.

Storage site for radioactive debris near Fukushima No. 1 is one step closer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/04/national/kagoshima-governor-positive-meti-briefing-reactor-restart/#.VFjAvMl5B1s>

JJI

KAGOSHIMA – The Lower House on Tuesday approved a bill for the construction of temporary storage facilities for radioactive waste on land near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The bill is expected to be enacted during the current extraordinary session of the Diet following debate in the Upper House.

The bill calls on the government to ensure the safety of the facilities and complete within 30 years the final disposal of radioactive waste, including contaminated soil, after moving it outside Fukushima Prefecture.

The government hopes to begin the transport of radioactive soil to the facilities in January.

The Lower House Environment Committee adopted a supplementary resolution calling on the government to select candidate sites and create a road map for final disposal.

The temporary storage facility is planned to be built on a site measuring **16 sq. km** straddling the Fukushima towns of Okuma and Futaba. The government has been in talks with more than 2,000 landowners to acquire the necessary land.



Store it all in one place, at the plant

November 6, 2014

Town offers counterproposal on radioactive waste

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Nov. 6, 2014 - Updated 17:31 UTC+1

The mayor of a Japanese town named as one of the candidate sites for the final disposal of radioactive waste says that kind of material should be stored in Fukushima Prefecture.

The central government plans to construct final disposal facilities in 5 prefectures in eastern and northeastern Japan. They will store radioactive waste generated from the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The waste contains more than 8,000 becquerels of radioactive substances per kilogram.

The central government chose Shioya Town in Tochigi Prefecture, neighboring Fukushima, as one of the sites.

The government plan is prompting local opposition. **Residents claim a water source near the planned**

construction site will be contaminated.

Mayor Kazuhisa Mikata finished delivering his town's counterproposal to all the municipalities in Tochigi Prefecture on Wednesday.

The proposal calls for all radioactive waste to be stored at an intermediate facility in a no-entry evacuation zone near the Daiichi plant. It adds the waste should be disposed of on the plant compound.

The mayor told NHK that he will seek understanding for his town's proposal, not just oppose the state's plan. He urged the Environment Ministry to review its basic policy, saying the state should pay sufficient compensation to Fukushima and **dispose of radioactive waste in one place.**

The central government plans to hold a meeting in Tochigi on Sunday to explain standards used to select candidate sites.

Just cheer up

November 7, 2014

Tokyo restaurant to host event to cheer up Fukushima natives

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141107p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Yoko Matsunaga, the 70-year-old proprietress of Yukun Sakagura, a Tokyo restaurant specializing in Kyushu cuisine, will inaugurate a monthly "It's Fukushima" evening in December to cheer up Fukushima Prefecture natives whose hometowns have been badly affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster. Her restaurant in Minato Ward's Shimbashi district, is wall-to-wall with notebooks in which graduates of high schools across the country have written various messages about their current jobs as well as memories of their high school days.

The restaurant is not only famous for fresh seafood from the Genkai and Ariake seas but also immensely popular among former high school boys and girls who swap stories of their adolescence and write messages in notebooks for their respective high schools.

Launched in 1987, the high school notebook campaign has led to a collection of about 2,680 notebooks accounting for more than half of all of Japan's high schools.

One day in September, a small group of young people got all fired up, holding a notebook for a high school in Fukushima Prefecture. There was another group of young people in their 20s in attendance from Fukushima. Matsunaga who has been engaged in volunteer activities to plant cherry trees in areas hard hit by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and the nuclear disaster asked the merrymakers if she could introduce them to each other.

"There were people among the diners who have been unable to return to their hometowns because of the nuclear accident. But they were joyous and fun. Above all, they were cheerful and thinking how to make Fukushima better," she relates.

The first among Fukushima high schools to have a notebook at the restaurant is Futaba High School in the town of Futaba where the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is located and has been

off-limits since the nuclear disaster. "There are still many people in distress after the disaster, but we want to help each other. I pray to return home someday," wrote one graduate of Fukutaba High School. Matsunaga consulted with a longtime customer in the hope that she could set up a venue for people from Fukushima to get together. Yuji Miyamori, 49, president of Eisen Shuzou Co, a sake brewery in Bandai, Fukushima Prefecture, and a college classmate of the customer, sent in 100 bottles of sake and shochu. "It's nice if I can be of any help. I want to drop by (at the restaurant) and talk about Fukushima and the merits of Japanese sake (with people from Fukushima)," Miyamori says.

The inaugural "It's Fukushima" evening is set for Dec. 13 from 4:30 p.m. for two hours. Fukushima natives are eligible and the initial fee is 2,000 yen per person and comes with three glasses of sake or shochu and selected appetizers. Each session is limited to 30 people and Matsunaga hopes to continue the special evening for a year.

Reservations can be made through her restaurant (telephone 03-3508-9296) on a first-come, first-served basis until the end of November for the December party.

November 07, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Rice farmers claim not covered by settlement

November 5, 2014

Fukushima rice farmers seeking restoration of land suffer setback

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20141105p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Three farmers from Fukushima Prefecture, who are demanding that their farmland be restored to the same conditions existing prior to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, were told by the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center that **their claim was not covered by the existing settlement agreement**, it has been learned.

Center representatives apparently told the farmers during the out-of-court settlement hearing, which was conducted via the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) process, "We do not accept claims with which the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) will not agree."

The Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, which supervises the center, has presented a "guideline" for items to be subject to compensation. A manual published by the center for survivors of the March 2011 disaster, however, states that "individual circumstances (above and beyond the guidelines) will also be taken into account."

The three farmers are Hiroyuki Suzuki, 64, from the village of Otama, Eiji Watanabe, 65, from the city of Nihonmatsu, and Toshikazu Takeda, 64, from the town of Inawashiro. All are fulltime farmers, and grow rice and other crops on plots of land that are between 9 and 40 hectares in size. **They all also utilize special cultivation procedures calling for strict limits on the amount of pesticides and chemical fertilizers to be used, and ship their rice to customers all over the country with whom they have signed direct contracts.**

"We have been trying to produce the best rice in all of Japan," Suzuki commented.

Suzuki's farm is about 60 kilometers from the nuclear power plant, and measurements conducted on Dec. 1, 2011 revealed that there were 16,200 becquerels of radioactive cesium for every kilogram of soil on his land.

Watanabe's farm, meanwhile, which is similarly located some 60 kilometers away from the nuclear power plant, was shown to have 6,090 becquerels per kilogram of soil on Aug. 2, 2011, while Takeda's field, located some 80 kilometers from the plant, had 1,450 becquerels per kilogram on Jan. 26, 2012.

While all of the rice grown on the three farms contained cesium below the government-set maximum level of 100 becquerels per kilogram, Takeda reports that "Many of my 300 customers started canceling their contracts, and at one point, I had only about 100."

The three farmers submitted their ADR claim to the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center in April 2012. **They sought financial compensation for shrinking revenues due to harmful rumors**, as well as additional funds in the amount of roughly 3 billion yen to restore their respective farmlands to their original condition.

While **the process of reversal tillage (whereby topsoil is replaced by soil lying further underground) results in air radiation dosages being lowered, it does not remove radioactive substances from the farmland**. And because the removal of the top layer of soil would not be accompanied by an addition of new soil, the farmers requested that the soil be replaced.

The farmers based their claims upon the cost of replacing the soil on farmland downstream on the Jinzu River in Toyama Prefecture, at around 46.7 million yen per hectare of land, after contamination resulted in the "itai itai" ("it hurts, it hurts") disease.

TEPCO denied the Fukushima farmers' claim via a written response in May 2012. At the first oral hearing held in October of the same year, a lawyer serving as a mediator for the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center made the comment that the case was not covered by the settlement agreement since the center did not handle cases to which TEPCO would not agree.

The settlement agreement that was presented in May 2013, however, only included the amount of money for reduced revenues. While the three farmers accepted it, **they also decided to file a suit demanding that their farmlands be restored to their former condition**.

Five additional farmers joined the initial three, for a total of eight plaintiffs, who brought the case on Oct. 14 of this year to the Koriyama branch of the Fukushima District Court. The farmers indicated that they were unable to arrive at a total compensation figure, but demanded that the levels of radioactive cesium be brought down to 50 becquerels or less per kilogram.

"The claim for reduced revenues was an attempt to seek compensation for past damages, but if the land is not restored to its prior condition, we will have to ask for more damages every year, which means that we have no future outlook," Suzuki said critically. "The center has no understanding at all about how agriculture works."

Meanwhile, a center spokesperson commented, "We cannot comment on individual cases."

November 05, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Decontamination almost impossible on hill with vacation homes



November 7, 2014

Vacation houses hamper decontamination work in famous Tochigi Pref. town

This is an aerial view of vacation houses in Nasu Highland in Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture, on Oct. 31, 2014. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141107p2a00m0na020000c.html>

NASU, Tochigi -- Decontamination work at Nasu Highland, one of Japan's most famous cottage areas, is making little headway because many owners of vacation houses have been unreachable in the aftermath of the disaster at the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant.

As of Nov. 4, only 3,361 houses or less than 20 percent of about 20,000 houses under the decontamination program in the town of Nasu have been cleared of radioactive soil and other contaminated waste. **The disaster cleanup has not progressed as scheduled because town authorities have been unable to contact many vacation homeowners from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa Prefecture in the south to win their consent.**

Rainwater runs down from contaminated hilly terrain dotted with vacation houses, prompting local residents to ask the town government to do something about it.

More than half of the houses in Nasu along the Tochigi-Fukushima border are vacation homes and the town has been designated as a contamination research area. But consent from each homeowner is a prerequisite for carrying out decontamination work. And the town has sent out research and decontamination consent forms to absentee homeowners since January last year.

While about 11,000 homeowners have given consent to decontamination work, some homeowners have refused to comply, saying they rarely use their vacation houses. About 3,600 homeowners have not responded to the consent forms. Most reminder notices that the town government sent to vacation homeowners have been unanswered.

In many cases, consent forms have been sent back to the town because homeowners have relocated from their registered address, according to town officials. Furthermore, there are a significant number of cases

in which relatives who have inherited the ownership of vacation houses have given up on managing the homes, leaving them in a dilapidated condition.

As a result, **decontamination work in all of an area has been next to impossible and done sporadically.** A town official in charge says vacation homeowners probably lack interest in radiation doses and decontamination work, as compared to permanent residents.

Under a special law on decontaminating radioactive substances, authorities concerned can proceed with decontamination work by posting a notice in a newspaper and taking other procedures even if a homeowner is unreachable. But contaminated soil from the cleanup work has been temporarily stored covered with water-shielding sheets on the premises of respective homes. "We can't do anything without consent from homeowners," the town official said.

The town extended the targeted completion of the decontamination program mapped out in April 2012 from the originally scheduled March 2014 to March 2017.

Local resident Noriko Mikusu, 69, says vacation homes on a slope adjacent to her home belong to people from Okinawa and other prefectures. But these homes have been abandoned probably because of their declining values and their homeowners have been unreachable, she says, adding decontamination work on her premises is meaningless because of the rainwater coming down from the vacation home compounds. Worse still, she says her grandchildren have stopped coming to her house.

November 07, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Wrong results, sorry

November 7, 2014

Fukushima sends out wrong thyroid test results

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141107_42.html

Nov. 7, 2014 - Updated 13:51 UTC+1

A hospital in Fukushima Prefecture mailed the results of thyroid examinations to incorrect addresses. Nearly 200 people received somebody else's test results.

The prefecture is checking the thyroid glands of all people who were aged 18 or younger at the time of the March 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Officials at **Fukushima Medical University** say 186 people underwent preliminary ultrasound examinations at 7 medical institutions in the prefecture in September.

The officials say someone else's examination results were sent to 173 of them.

Two of them were found to have lumps in their thyroid glands large enough to require a second, more detailed examination. They were incorrectly informed that they do not need to undergo re-examination.

The officials say staff at the university made mistakes in creating a list of addresses of the examinees.

A senior official at the medical university apologized for the mistakes, saying that the incident should

never have happened.

The official said he wants to apologize to the people involved in person and work with all his colleagues to prevent a recurrence.

Red Cross and Red Crescent in Fukushima

Nuclear watch

Lessons from Fukushima

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20141105.html>

Aid workers from the world's biggest humanitarian organization gathered recently in Fukushima. They wanted to gain firsthand knowledge on how people worldwide should prepare for nuclear disasters. NHK WORLD's Yuki Hidaka reports.

Representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies visited the town of Namie in Fukushima Prefecture last month. They came from 17 different countries.

Secretary General Elhadj Amadou Sy and his colleagues wanted to learn from those who had experienced the nuclear disaster.

On March 11, 2011, Japanese Red Cross rescue teams rushed to the Tohoku region immediately after the tsunami. But they had to retreat once the nuclear crisis began in Fukushima.

Despite the society's 150-year history of conducting relief activities globally, the teams were completely unprepared for a nuclear accident. They had no tools to measure radiation and no protective gear. They had to leave the area and its people behind.

The unprecedented disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant provided some important lessons.

"Lessons learned is about to prepare, and to prepare better. So I think it's about being vigilant all the time, anticipating on issues, not to be complacent in any possible way."

Elhadj Amadou Sy / IFRC Secretary General

The visiting aid workers talked to the residents of Namie. They had all evacuated to a city that was a 2-hour-drive away from their hometown because of the radiation.

"I know it's tough to be displaced from your city town. But how is the living here?"

One of the participants

"I just want to go home."

Old woman from Namie

The visitors learned that they need to be prepared to care for those who have been displaced.

Yutaka Konno, a spokesperson for one of the evacuees' residential areas, explained that people who end up there need medical assistance.

He added that they may also need emotional assistance, as uncertainty about the future makes them feel depressed.

"I don't want there to be another accident like this again, anywhere. Please tell the whole world, and use what you learned here to come up with countermeasures."

Yutaka Konno

Sikder Mokaddes Ahmed comes from Bangladesh, where the country's first nuclear plant is scheduled to begin operating in a few years. He says the trip made him realize his country must be prepared for a possible crisis.

"We have over overpopulation. In such kind of situation, within this area, it will be millions of people affected, not like thousands of people like here. That is why, actually, our preparedness and our awareness program must be something very very bigger."

Sikder Mokaddes Ahmed / Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

"We hope that those accidents won't happen, but in case they happen, at least, that our volunteers and our workers who go first on the frontline are protected, so they can better protect the communities which will be affected."

Elhadj Amadou Sy / IFRC Secretary General

Publicity from abroad

November 11, 2014

Swiss travel agency owner pedals around Tohoku to promote region

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201411110003>

By MITOMU NARITA/ Staff Writer

HACHINOHE, Aomori Prefecture--After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami ravaged the Tohoku region in 2011, Thomas Kohler walked from Hokkaido in northern Japan to Kagoshima Prefecture in the south, attesting to the nation's safety.

Now, the 47-year-old Swiss man is back, this time as a travel agency owner riding a bicycle around coastal areas and sightseeing spots in the Tohoku region to introduce its charms to Swiss travelers.

When Kohler was a child, he heard stories about Japan from a classmate who had returned from the country to Switzerland. The stories piqued his interest in Japan and made him an admirer of the country.

When the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011, Kohler was in charge of Japan at a Swiss travel company he was working for. The disaster and the subsequent nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were extensively reported by the Swiss media. As a result, the number of travelers who contacted his company to book trips to Japan dropped to zero.

"All of the areas of Japan were not necessarily contaminated by radioactive substances," he thought.

Four months after the disaster, Kohler came to Japan. Spending five months, he walked from Cape Soya at the northern tip of Hokkaido to Cape Sata in the southern tip of the Osumi Peninsula in Kagoshima Prefecture.

During his travels, some of the people he met walked with him on some stretches. They also answered his questions.

"There are many kind people in Japan," Kohler thought.

In 2012, he established his own travel agency in Switzerland. Some Swiss booked trips through his company to parts of western Japan, including Kyoto. However, none sought to visit the Tohoku region.

"Unless I go to the Tohoku region myself, it is difficult to convince tourists to go there, even if I enthusiastically pitch the region to them. I want to convey the cultures and delicious foods of Tohoku on my own," Kohler thought.

Starting in Hachinohe in southeastern Aomori Prefecture on Nov. 8, **he plans to pedal to coastal areas in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, which were damaged by the tsunami, and sightseeing spots in inland areas of Fukushima Prefecture.**

Kohler is scheduled to arrive at his final destination, Aizuwakamatsu in Fukushima Prefecture, two weeks later. He plans to post his experiences from the bicycle trip on his blog.

Nuclear Nation II

November 14, 2014

Dates set for sequel on Fukushima community ripped apart by nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201411140003>

By NAOKO KAWAMURA/ Staff Writer

“Nuclear Nation II,” a sequel to Atsushi Funahashi documentary that showed the world how the Fukushima nuclear disaster destroyed a local community, will hit theaters in Japan on Nov. 15. The new film shows the continuing plight of people from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, where the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is located.

“Nuclear Nation” released in 2012, covered the nine-month period after the disaster unfurled in March 2011. The documentary was shown in 40 countries, including the United States and Germany, and received positive reviews.

“I like viewers to think about (the nuclear issue) from the perspective of the evacuees,” Funahashi said. “It will be rewarding if they feel the gravity of the time that has passed since the disaster for people from Futaba.”

To complete the sequel, Funahashi, 40, continuously filmed the daily lives of Futaba residents, who have lived as evacuees in and outside the prefecture, for nearly three years. He financed the project partly from donations collected from the public through crowdfunding on the Internet.

Funahashi’s camera keeps track of how the protracted evacuation has further damaged the Futaba community.

His main subjects include a man with mixed feelings about his work in decommissioning the reactors at the stricken nuclear plant.

Members of a family that has lived in Futaba for six centuries also face an agonizing choice. Their property was designated as a site for a planned interim storage facility for contaminated debris.

Although the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has contributed to the local economy for 40 years, Funahashi’s films show that the residents ended up losing more after the triple meltdown in 2011.

The filmmaker said he paid special attention to details of the lives of the Futaba residents so that viewers can feel the experience of life as an evacuee.

In the sequel’s climax, a Futaba woman describes the residents’ agony at a government-organized meeting held to explain the interim storage facility plan.

“We, the town residents, have been divided and isolated again and again--first by the nuclear accident, second by government decisions regarding compensation, and then by those on the evacuation order,” the woman tells the government officials.

Funahashi said he is determined to continue keeping track of the people from Futaba until they find places where they can live in peace and happiness.

This sense of mission comes from his strong sense of guilt as a Tokyo resident who has benefitted from electricity generated in Fukushima, he said.

“Nuclear Nation II” will open at the Polepole Higashi-Nakano theater in Tokyo’s Nakano Ward on Nov. 15 and then hit screens across Japan. People from Futaba who appear in the documentary will be invited to speak from the stage on Nov. 15.

Nuclear watch: Earning consumer trust

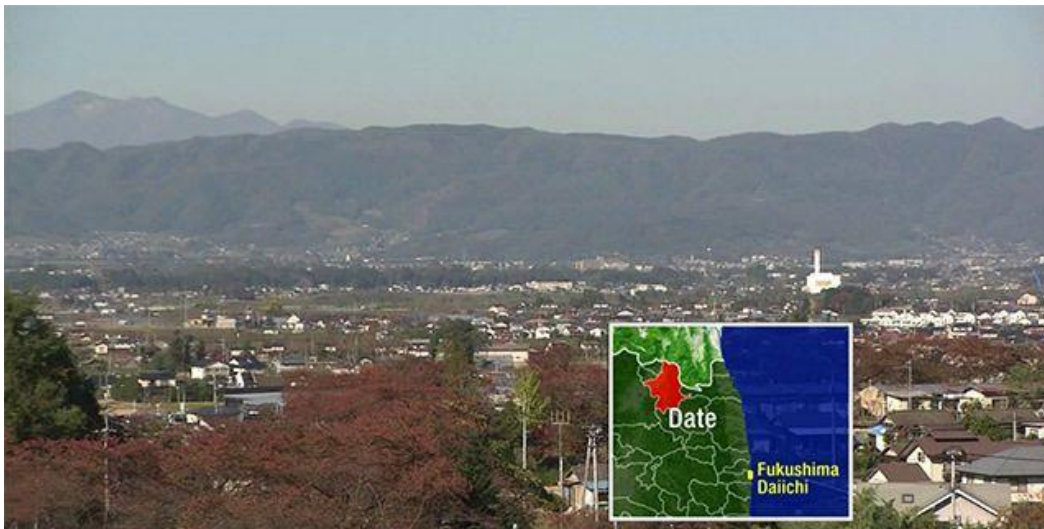
November 12, 2014

Nuclear Watch

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20141112.html>

Earning consumer trust

Farmers in northeastern Japan are struggling to recover from the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Radioactive substances contaminated some of their crops. And consumers are still reluctant to buy food from the area even if it has been deemed safe. In this edition of Nuclear Watch, we look at how Fukushima's farmers are managing this year's harvest.



Date City is about 60 kilometers northwest of the Fukushima Daiichi plant. The main economic activity of the town is farming. Many people here grow rice.

This year, 210-thousand bags of rice were harvested within Date.

Farmers must bring all their produce to this facility for radiation checks.



Many consumers still shy away from rice harvested in Fukushima. Consumers bought just 20 percent of Fukushima-Prefecture rice put on the market last year.

Officials check every bag with radiation detectors. The central government's limit for radioactive substances in food is 100 becquerels per kilogram. But Fukushima Prefecture has set a stricter limit of 60 becquerels. Farmers cannot sell items that exceed this level.

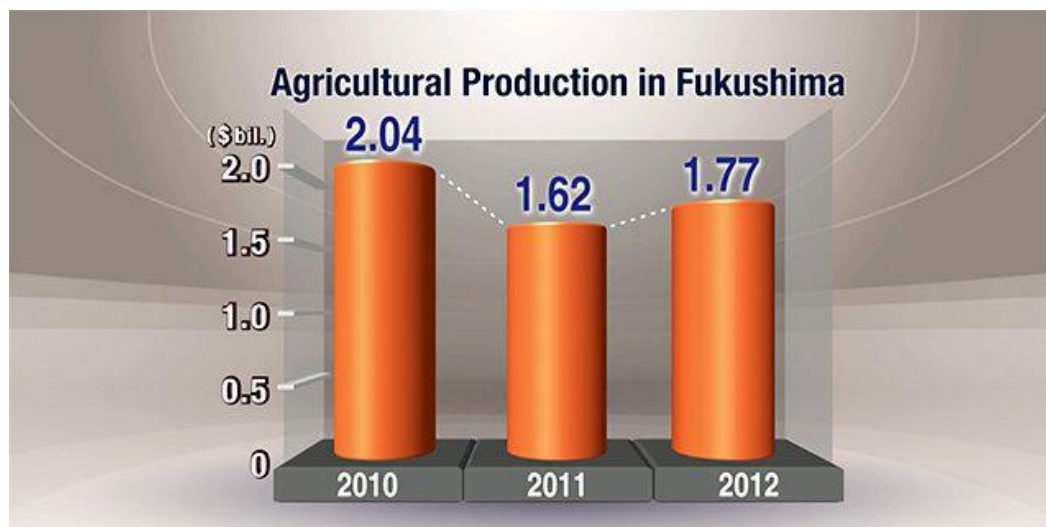
Nothing over the limit has yet turned up at this testing center. But they say they will continue to check every single bag of rice.

"Sure, it's costly, but we believe it's necessary for the peace of mind of the people who eat our rice."

Hiroiyuki Yoshida / Date City official

Agriculture has long been the prefecture's economic backbone. In the year before the disaster, Fukushima's farmers cultivated 2 billion dollars worth of produce.

The figure plummeted by more than 400 million dollars in the wake of the disaster. Farmers couldn't use fields that had been contaminated. Thorough decontamination and exhaustive radiation checks have gradually helped reverse the trend. Agricultural output began to recover in 2012, but was still about 300 million dollars short of the pre-disaster amount. Farmers say they need to do more to overcome the concerns of consumers.



And for some farmers, radiation does continue to pose a problem.

Koichi Sato grows fruit...another important crop for Date.
His main source of revenue in the winter months used to be dried fruit.

'Anpo' dried persimmons are a regional specialty and have long been an important source of income for farmers during the low season.

Sato and other farmers make the specialty by smoking and drying persimmons for about a month.

Workers decontaminated all 250-thousand of the area's persimmon trees. But radiation levels in the dried fruit were still too high. There is a reason for that.



"Drying persimmons concentrates the contamination by a factor of 4 or 5. So 10 becquerels in raw fruit becomes 50 or 60 becquerels when it's dried."

Koichi Sato / Persimmon farmer

This year, after three years of decontamination work, radiation levels in Sato's fruit have dropped low enough for him to start making Anpo again.

"The time has finally come! I'm really happy to start shipping persimmons again."

Koichi Sato / Persimmon farmer

But only a portion of Sato's products have been cleared to sell. He's still waiting for radiation levels to drop on other parts of his land.

And other farmers are also waiting for the levels to drop to below the level set by Fukushima Prefecture.

They're putting their faith and efforts into the radiation tests -- and hoping that, over time, they can restore customers' confidence in their produce.

TEPCO faces another suit for suicide

November 14, 2014

Relatives of man who killed himself to sue TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141114_30.html

Nov. 14, 2014 - Updated 10:49 UTC+1

Relatives of a man who killed himself after the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant plan to sue its operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

On April 11th, 2011, one month after the accident, the central government showed a plan to designate Iitate Village in Fukushima Prefecture as an evacuation zone.

The following day, Fumio Okubo committed suicide at his home at the age of 102. He was the oldest person in the village at the time. He had said he could not evacuate from where he'd lived for a century.

The 3 relatives plan to file a suit with the Tokyo District Court as soon as next month. They say they'll seek damages of at least 30 million yen, or about 260,000 dollars.

The 3 say that had the accident not happened, Okubo would have been able to live out his life in the village he'd always loved.

One of the relatives, Okubo's daughter-in-law Mieko, says she wishes he'd passed away happily in Iitate with his family at his side. She adds that for his bereaved relatives to live positively, she wants to prove that he would not have killed himself without the accident.

Iitate remains an evacuation zone 3 years and 8 months later.

Tokyo Electric officials expressed condolences for Okubo's death. They said they'll listen to his relatives and respond sincerely, regardless of the suit.

Bus companies' battle for compensation

November 15, 2014

Bus companies face uphill battle over nuclear disaster compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141115p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A group of charter bus companies must submit documentary proof for each cancellation attributed to the Fukushima nuclear crisis to receive compensation for profits lost due to the disaster, the companies have been told by the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center.

Sixteen charter bus companies in Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture filed an out-of-court alternative dispute resolution (ADR) claim with the government-backed dispute resolution center. Each of the companies received numerous reservation cancellations following the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns, with some seeing their profits plunge more than 50 percent.

The companies submitted the group compensation claim in October 2012. Their claim compared operating profits for a one-year period following the nuclear accident against the average profit for the several years prior -- demanding the difference between the two figures.

During the first scheduled hearing in December 2012, the mediating lawyer from the center who was responsible for drawing up the settlement proposal told the bus companies that they had to submit documents specifying how they knew that the nuclear accident had been the reason for each individual reservation cancellation. One of the 16 companies succeeded in preparing the documentation as it had asked their clients the reason for each cancellation, but the other 15 were unable to comply with this requirement.

The bus companies emphasized that the demand for them to prepare such documentation was "too severe." Meanwhile, the center pressured the 15 firms on numerous occasions to drop their compensation claim.

During a subsequent meeting held in December 2013, the center produced a settlement proposal for the single firm that had complied with the documentation requirement, while telling the other 15 companies that they were being dropped from any further negotiations.

Calling the decision unjust, two of the bus companies have resubmitted their claim -- while several other firms among the 15 are presently preparing to do likewise.

According to the guidelines for the scope and amount of compensation that were established by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, which oversees the center, there are only 10 prefectures nationwide -- including Fukushima Prefecture -- where companies in the tourist industry are eligible for compensation for domestic reservation cancellations.

In the 10 designated prefectures, the guidelines specify that it is sufficient to submit documentation such as financial statements that prove a discrepancy in total sales before and after the nuclear disaster.

Compensation would then be calculated based on consideration of past profits.

Apparently because the 16 companies submitting the group compensation claim are not based in the 10 designated prefectures, however, they were required to submit additional documentation.

Center representatives declined a request for an interview, saying that they were "unable to discuss individual cases."

One major bus company reported that reservation cancelations numbered around 10,000 in 2011 alone. A company insider commented, "It was not appropriate for us to be asking our clients (at that time) whether or not the nuclear accident was the reason for the cancelations." The firm added that the center's attitude in requiring the companies to submit the additional documentation was "exceedingly cruel."

"Many bus companies are not on an equal footing with tour companies," commented Isamu Mitsuhashi, president of the Japan Academic Society of Tourism and professor of tourism at Shumei University.

"Particularly in the case of small bus companies, determining the reason for reservation cancelations would be a difficult undertaking.

"What the center is asking these companies to do is not realistic," Professor Mitsuhashi added. "Tourist-related firms are the first to suffer the impact of disasters. The center should take the situation of these companies into serious consideration when processing their claims."

November 15, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

First visit of new Governor

November 14, 2014

New Fukushima Governor Inspects Plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141115_05.html

Nov. 14, 2014 - Updated 18:27 UTC+1

The new governor of Fukushima has called for all nuclear reactors in the prefecture to be permanently closed.

Three days after taking office, Masao Uchibori visited Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant on Friday to inspect the process for decommissioning reactors. They were damaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Uchibori observed ongoing work to dismantle a reactor building cover. A project began last month to clear debris and to eventually remove the nuclear fuel.

The governor also inspected equipment used to decontaminate radioactive water.

After the inspection, Uchibori met with the president of Tokyo Electric Power Company, Naomi Hirose.

The governor urged TEPCO's president to decommission all 10 reactors in the prefecture, including those at another plant 10 kilometers away.

He also stressed the need to prevent errors in managing radioactive wastewater at the site.

Hirose said TEPCO will seriously consider the requests.

TEPCO & compensation

November 14, 2014

Nuclear evacuees seek rise in TEPCO compensation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141114_34.html

Nov. 14, 2014 - Updated 09:58 UTC+1

More than 2,800 evacuees from a village near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant are seeking state arbitration for a rise in compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Company, the plant's operator.

Iitate Village is still an evacuation zone three years and eight months after the nuclear accident at the power plant. But decontamination work is proceeding across the village, which is located about 40 kilometers from the plant.

About half the village's population, or 2,837 evacuees, filed for arbitration with the Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims on Friday.

They say their prolonged evacuation is splitting local communities and families and threatening generations of the village's history.

The evacuees are seeking increased compensation and an apology from TEPCO. They want the current monthly evacuation compensation per capita more than tripled to 350,000 yen, or roughly 3,000 dollars per month. They also call for around 172,000 dollars per evacuee in compensation for ruining their village lives.

The representative of the evacuees, Kenichi Hasegawa, explained why they filed for the class-action arbitration. He said the evacuees decided they must express their anger as their lives have not improved since the nuclear accident. He added that the evacuees want their village lives back.

TEPCO said in a statement it has yet to learn the details of the documents. But the company pledges a sincere response to the arbitration in line with settlement procedures.

Rice planting dance in Fukushima

November 16, 2014

Tsunami survivors revive rice planting dance in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201411160023>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--A group here performed a traditional local dance on its home ground on Nov. 15 for the first time since the 2011 tsunami killed 30 percent of the organization's members.

The Taueodori (Rice planting dance) took place on the compound of Kibunejinja shrine in the Murakami area of the city's Odaka district.

The dance had been performed in spring every two years to pray for rich harvests. Handed down through the generations, the dance was at risk of disappearing after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck on March 11, 2011.

The ensuing tsunami destroyed the homes of 71 of the 74 households in the Murakami area, killing 62 of the 280 residents there. Twelve of the dance-preservation group's 39 members died in the disaster, and survivors were scattered around the country as evacuees.

A year after the disaster, some group members started making preparations for a revival of the dance. "Amid the scattering of local residents, this was the only thing we could fall back on," said member Tokiko Okawada, 63.

The members bought or made costumes and tools for the dance. They practiced and performed at festivals and events held in other parts of Fukushima Prefecture.

When the tsunami hit, Kibunejinja shrine, which is located on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean, served as an evacuation center.

On Nov. 15, about 30 people gathered in its compound, including Hisayoshi Nakajima, 79, former group chairman who played a "fue" flute for the dance, and Kazuko Wakamatsu, 64, one of the dancers.

The Taueodori dance starts with the playing of a local folk song, "Soma Nagareyama." Women, wearing traditional "hanagasa" hats, use elegant hand moves to reproduce scenes of rice planting.

After the dance, Yukari Murata, 30, the youngest member of the preservation group, said: "It was good that we were able to revive the dance on its home ground. Our next challenge is to look for young people to inherit it."

Murata currently lives as an evacuee in Minami-Soma's Haramachi district.

Officials of the Fukushima prefectural board of education took video footage of the dance to show to future generations.

Removing ships wrecked by tsunami

November 21, 2014

Work begins in Fukushima to demolish ships stranded by 2011 tsunami

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201411210063>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

NAMIE, Fukushima Prefecture--Work got under way here on Nov. 21 to demolish and remove ships that were wrecked and swept inland by the tsunami generated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Seventy abandoned ships, mostly fishing boats, still remain in evacuation zones around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Workers were seen Nov. 21 using cranes to remove cabins and structures from the ships' main decks as the first step in the dismantling process.

The vessels have been left untouched for more than three and a half years since evacuation orders were issued soon after the Fukushima nuclear accident unfolded.

The work is being led by the Environment Ministry. The ministry's environmental restoration office in Fukushima said that 62 boats are in Namie, six in Tomioka and one each in Minami-Soma and Naraha. All are expected to be dismantled and removed from the premises by the end of March.

Many of the abandoned vessels are rusting away and have corroded reinforced plastic parts. Some have weeds growing on them.

Votive tablets for tourists

November 22, 2014

Fukushima village promotes tourism with new votive tablet

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141122p2a00m0na009000c.html>

HINOEMATA, Fukushima -- Souvenir shops and inns in this village with the nation's lowest population density have started sales of an "ema" or votive tablet to help cure illness or kick smoking.

People are simply required to buy a votive tablet, write down things they want to cut ties with such as a spouse's extramarital affair, break it in two and dedicate it to the centuries-old stone statue called Hashiba-no-Bamba, long known as a goddess who can dispel bad luck and bring romance.

The votive tablet comes in two types, one measuring 15 centimeters in diameter and the other 11 centimeters. The round-shaped Paulownia sheet is easily split in two after a worshipper writes down an ill fortune he or she wants to get rid of and later dedicated to the Hashiba-no-Bamba, situated along the approach to the shrine in the heart of the village.

Hung by the statue are many votive tablets inscribed with things such as the names of a former lover or a nasty boss, illnesses or a husband's affair with another woman.

According to the Hinoemata village office, the statue was originally erected beside the Ina River to protect children from water accidents. But after flooding in 1902, villagers relocated it to the shrine's approach. After that, people wishing to part company dedicated sharp scissors to the goddess, while those in search of a marriage dedicated scissors with dull blades.

One theory goes that there was a marriage shrine nearby, but that has never been proven. Several hundred pairs of scissors are piled up high in front of the statue, and the sharp scissors outnumber the dull ones by about two to one.

Tetsuji Hoshi, 64, who runs an inn and soba noodle shop in the village, consulted with former classmates and other residents and hit upon an idea of promoting the votive tablet.

Itakura Furniture, which relocated from Minamisoma to Kitakata in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, is in charge of making the votive tablets, including heart-shaped ones.

Hinoemata, which has about 600 residents, had a population density of 1.59 per square kilometer as of October 2013, making the village the nation's least densely populated municipality, according to the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry and other sources. Many climbers stay in the village as a gateway to Oze National Park from May to October. Hoshi says the Hashiba-no-Bamba will lure many tourists.

The big and small votive tablets for cutting ties sell for 700 yen and 600 yen, respectively, while the votive tablet for romance is 500 yen. They are sold at the village tourism center and souvenir shops. The village's tourism office (0241-75-2432) handles inquiries.

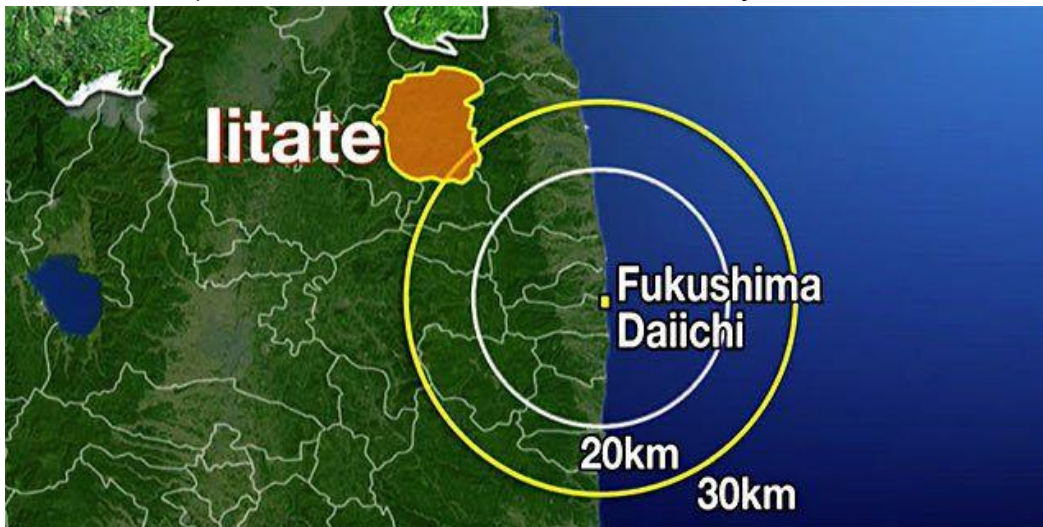
November 22, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Nuclear Watch: Evacuees seek redress

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclearwatch/20141120.html>

Fukushima Evacuees Seek Redress

More than 120 thousand people who once lived in Fukushima Prefecture still wonder when they'll be able to return home. They've been displaced since the nuclear disaster 3 years and 8 months ago. Today we focus on the small village of Iitate, a rural area about 40 kilometers northwest of the nuclear plant. Government officials issued an evacuation order for people living within 20 kilometers of the facility right after the accident. And they warned residents within 20 to 30 kilometers to stay indoors three days after that. Iitate was just outside of that zone, but was still heavily contaminated.



Almost all residents of Iitate have left their homes, and they're unhappy with the lack of progress made in their community. NHK WORLD's Noriko Okada reports.

On November 14th, a group of Iitate residents filed for arbitration with the Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims.

The Center's purpose is to mediate in disputes between victims of the nuclear accident and Tokyo Electric Power Company.

The claim brings together about half of the village's 6,000 residents.

"Our lives haven't improved at all in the 3 years and 8 months since the accident. We felt we had to express our anger."

Kenichi Hasegawa / Representative of Iitate residents

In their claim, the residents underline that unlike other areas, Iitate wasn't evacuated immediately after the nuclear accident. They also accuse the government of knowing in advance that wind would spread radioactive particles over the village.

The villagers demand compensation from TEPCO for the psychological suffering they endured because of their prolonged exposure to radiation. They also want to be compensated for what they call "the disruption of their lives" in Iitate.

Among the petitioners is Tadayoshi Sato.

He currently lives with his wife and mother in a temporary housing complex in Fukushima.

Before the accident, the Satos lived under the same roof with their son, his wife and their 4 grandchildren. But now, most of the family lives in Tokyo. They only get to meet about twice a year.

"I cry every time I look at these pictures. I know my grandchildren already got used to their new life."

Tadayoshi Sato

Sato says that right after the accident; he left his grandchildren outside to play without knowing that radiation levels had become extremely high.

"I've heard some specialists say something could happen in 5, 7, or 10 years. So what will happen to the kids over the next 5 or 10 years? Nobody knows."

Tadayoshi Sato

Sato used to grow rice and vegetables on his 7 hectares of land. The property that had fed his ancestors now lies heavily contaminated with radioactive particles.



"This is not about the money. We've lost absolutely everything, and we have no idea where we're headed. How long will it take to get litate back to what it was? 10 years? 20 years?"

Tadayoshi Sato

TEPCO officials say they will sincerely consider the claim following the arbitration procedure.

Sato and the residents of Iitate hope their petition will shed light on TEPCO's responsibility and help the evacuees get their lives back in order.

Will nuclear emergencies be classified?

November 28, 2014

Concerns simmer over access to nuclear info as enforcement of secrets law nears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141128p2a00m0na016000c.html>

On March 25, 2011, two weeks after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, a senior government official showed Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai a map. "I'd never seen anything like it," Sakurai says, adding that he still remembers how shocked and angry he became as the information hit him. It was a map of radiation levels around the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. And though he was responsible for the safety of a city just up the coast from the power station, it was the first time he'd been told that the neighboring town of Namie and village of Iitate -- both at least partially outside the 30-kilometer evacuation zone around the plant -- were badly contaminated. The southern section of Minamisoma was inside the zone, and many residents there had evacuated -- some of them to areas this bureaucrat was now telling him were highly radioactive.

"Vital information like this needs to be given to the people who live here," Sakurai snapped at the official. The March 2011 earthquake and consequent nuclear disaster were, for Japan, part of the same emergency. When the triple earthquake-tsunami-meltdown disaster struck, the Japanese government deployed over 100,000 Self-Defense Forces personnel, while the United States also came to the rescue with a fleet of about 20 U.S. Navy vessels (including an aircraft carrier), some 160 aircraft and more than 20,000 troops in the massive Operation Tomodachi. This vast mobilization got help to most of the disaster survivors. The Japanese government shared data on radiation distribution from its System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) with the U.S. military on March 14, three days after the triple-meltdown at the Fukushima plant. **The data, however, was kept from the Japanese people until March 23**, inviting a storm of criticism that the government had needlessly exposed people to radiation. On Dec. 10, four days before the House of Representatives election, the special state secrets protection law will go into effect. The law prescribes a prison term of up to 10 years for those who spill designated secrets in four categories: defense, diplomacy, counterespionage, and counterterrorism.

In fact, none of Japan's political parties -- including the largest ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) -- had ever publicly promised to implement a secrets law in the past. The idea initially popped up during Shinzo Abe's first term as prime minister in 2007. That year, Japan and the U.S. signed an intelligence-sharing pact, and Japan effectively promised its powerful ally that it would prepare a law to protect secret information.

A secrets bill remained under consideration during the subsequent Fukuda and Aso administrations, and was interrupted by the 2009 election that brought the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to power. The Cabinet of the last DPJ Prime Minister Yasuhiko Noda began preparing a bill, but it never reached the Diet. In 2012 came the second Abe Cabinet, which set to work on a bill that was submitted to the Diet in October 2013.

During the intense debate on the special state secrets bill, discussion turned to what effect it would have on nuclear power. Masako Mori, the minister in charge of shepherding the legislation into law, and other government figures stressed that information on nuclear disasters would not be classified as state secrets by any means. **Nuclear reactors, however, could be a terrorist target, and as such, there's no guarantee that information about nuclear plants vital to the safety of the Japanese people won't be classified.**

The fact is the government quickly ended up lagging behind events in the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and both Fukushima's prefectural and municipal leaders and many of their citizens are deeply distrustful of the special states secrets law. The Fukushima Prefectural Assembly voted unanimously in October last year to submit a letter to the national government demanding the bill be handled carefully. At a public hearing on the bill held by the House of Representatives in the city of Fukushima in November last year, all five locals who spoke said they were worried about it.

One of those five was Tamotsu Baba, mayor of Namie, who said, "The main principle here is not the protection of secrets, but the release of information" to the people. At a public address a short time earlier, Baba had stated that SPEEDI and other information "was hidden from us. They (the central government) told us that they didn't know how accurate the information was, and that they kept it under wraps to prevent a panic. Well, human lives are far more important than all that. This is a basic issue that comes even before any discussion about whether such information would be classified secret" under the new law.

Just a day after the public hearing in Fukushima, the special state secrets protection bill was railroaded through the special lower house committee considering it, and then whisked through the House of Councillors after only a week of debate.

The Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs, which governs the release of government documents to the public, came into force in 2001. In 2011, the then DPJ-led administration submitted revisions to this act to the Diet that would reduce the discretion that government organs had over what to release and what to keep locked up; make access to documents free of charge; and effectively shorten the waiting period for information access requests to three weeks. The bill, however, died before it could become law.

On the possibility that information on nuclear accidents and "nuclear emergencies" could be kept secret, Sakurai says, "I'm worried about that. We'd be in trouble if that ever happened."

November 28, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Festive illuminations to comfort evacuees

December 1, 2014

Illumination event begins for Fukushima evacuees

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 1, 2014 - Updated 03:26 UTC+1

Festive illuminations are now shining at temporary housing in Fukushima Prefecture, northern Japan, to help raise the spirits of evacuees of the March 2011 disaster.

The lights were switched on in the parking lot of the housing in Minamisoma City, on Sunday, ahead of the winter holiday season. The facility is home to more than 570 households.

About 30,000 LED lights decorating a 5-meter tower and 2 arches sparkled into life after a countdown ceremony.

A 66-year-old woman said living in the temporary housing for a long period of time is hard. But she said the illuminations help ease her mind and encourage her to work hard to return home.

The lighting organizer, Masataka Watanobe, said he has mixed feelings about holding the event for the 3rd year. But he said he hopes the illuminations will bring cheer to the evacuees.

The lighting display will remain through January 12th.

Rebuilding efforts just "inching along"



December 1, 2014

3/11 recovery slow going under Abe

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/01/national/311-recovery-slow-going-abe/#.VHyvcMI5Cos>

Efforts to rebuild areas devastated by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami have inched along since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe returned to power in December 2012.

Three years and eight months have passed since the natural disasters, which sparked the nuclear crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power station.

Nearly 236,000 people are still living as evacuees in communities stricken by the powerful earthquake, tsunami and triple meltdown.

Similarly, little progress has been made on the disposal of radioactive soil and other contaminated waste from the nuclear disaster.

Yet, since his return to power two years ago, Abe has visited disaster-affected areas almost every month in a bid to show he remains focused on reconstruction.

"I want to make sure all disaster-affected citizens can return to normal lives as early as possible," Abe has said, noting that his government has taken steps to build homes and create jobs for them.

Public housing for those displaced by the disasters has increased to 3,000 units from less than 100 units at the time of Abe's 2012 return to power. But those 3,000 homes are only 14 percent of the planned total. As of Nov. 13, the number of people still living as evacuees across Japan was 235,957.

Efforts to create jobs in disaster-affected areas have also seen slow progress.

The fishing industry, the main source of business in the northeast, has been struggling with a sharp fall in sales. Less than a third of the merchants have seen sales recover to 80 percent of pre-disaster levels.

Efforts to promote new businesses have just recently begun in the damaged areas and thus contributed little to job creation.

The disposal of radioactive waste poses another headache, including soil gathered by crews decontaminating areas near the crippled Fukushima plant.

In August, the Fukushima Prefectural Government accepted a plan to build interim storage facilities for highly radioactive soil and other such waste in the prefecture.

The Diet has enacted a law stipulating that the country will finish disposing of the waste outside of the prefecture within 30 years, in line with a request from prefectural officials. But little headway has been made in negotiations to buy land from owners in the Fukushima towns of Okuma and Futaba, which host the plant and where the interim storage facilities will be built. So it's uncertain whether it will be possible to begin storing radioactive soil at the site in January 2015, as planned.

The central government also wants to build permanent disposal facilities for lower-level radioactive soil and waste in five other prefectures that got nuclear fallout, including Miyagi and Tochigi. But the policy faces strong opposition from residents in those prefectures.

The town of Shioya in Tochigi Prefecture was selected as the site of one such facility. But local authorities have proposed the lower-level waste should be housed in Fukushima Prefecture — a suggestion that has angered many evacuees displaced by the disaster.

Abe's administration has raised the total spending limit on post-disaster reconstruction measures during the five-year intensive rebuilding period through fiscal 2015 from ¥19 trillion to ¥25 trillion.

But reconstruction costs are expected to peak over the next three years, according to Iwate Gov. Takuya Tasso. Municipalities in disaster-affected areas are uneasy about future funding because **the central government has been unclear about reconstruction spending during and after fiscal 2016.**

Politicians have forgotten about Fukushima

December 2, 2014

Fukushima evacuees worry whether politicians have their interests in mind

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20141202p2a00m0na028000c.html>

Some three years and eight months after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster around 46,000 evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture continue to live spread out across the country. The plant continues to have problems and there is no sign of when evacuees may be able to return home. With the race on for the Dec. 14 House of Representatives election, evacuees worry whether their voices will reach the ears of the politicians in charge.

"The senseless radiation that falls on the Futaba region residents robbed them of their homeland, and the people, dispersed with ease, wander aimlessly under far away skies."

So reads one of the poems of Chikara Kojima, 79, who wrote the piece after evacuating to Tokyo from the village of Katsurao, Fukushima Prefecture. The one-bedroom apartment he shares in Tokyo with his wife, Yasu, 84, is stuffed with everyday items.

"I never thought we would be living here so long," says Yasu with a sigh.

Chikara was actually born in Tokyo, but settled in Fukushima Prefecture after moving with his mother to her parents' house during World War II. While working at a post office, he made creative works on the side. Blessed with three children and eight grandchildren, he enjoyed when they came to visit.

That happy life was taken away by the nuclear disaster. Located only around 25 kilometers from the Fukushima plant, Katsurao was designated as an evacuation zone. With the help of their children, Chikara

and Yasu moved to Tokyo, shifting around until they settled into their current, publically-managed apartment.

"When my children or grandchildren come, they don't stay the night because we don't have much room. Even though they live near, they seem far away," says Chikara.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said through this election that he is asking the public's opinion on "Abenomics," his economic policies. In response, Yasu says, "**The economy is more important to him than what is happening to us evacuees. The politicians have forgotten about Fukushima, about the disaster-hit areas.**"

"Our lives haven't changed at all these past three years and eight months. The nuclear plants could be restarted, and the evacuees of Fukushima swept under the rug like they never existed. It is the job of politicians to show us when we will be able to return home," said Chikara, with a stronger tone of voice. Meanwhile, Katsutoshi Sato, 53, who heads a Shiga Prefecture association for evacuees from the 2011 triple disaster, says, "Even now there are many people who cannot return to their homes. I want the candidates in this election to face that fact and debate about support policies."

As of October, there were 235 evacuees from three Tohoku prefectures living in Shiga Prefecture, and the prefectural and municipal governments there have been providing them with free public housing. However, this free housing is available on a year-by-year basis, and the prefectural government may start charging rent from next year.

Sato himself evacuated to the city of Ritto, Shiga Prefecture, from Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, with his wife, mother and daughter. His mother is confined to a wheelchair due to the effects of a stroke and lives in a wheelchair-accessible, free city-managed apartment. If the apartment loses its free status it will cost around 70,000 yen a month in rent.

Sato says, "Even when evacuees find work at the locations they evacuated to, they don't make the money that they did before the disaster. In the election, I want the candidates to clearly lay out what the issues are and specifically say how they will address them. Just chanting 'recovery from the disaster' will not bring our lives back to how they were."

December 02, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima: The reality

December 5, 2014

Party leaders urged to go see Fukushima's harsh realities for themselves

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141205p2a00m0na018000c.html>



Stuffed animals that were found during the removal of debris are on display at a store in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 2, 2014. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

FUKUSHIMA -- When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leader Banri Kaieda made their first campaign speeches for the upcoming general election in the Fukushima Prefecture cities of Soma and Iwaki, respectively, on Dec. 2, I was in Soma to listen to Abe's speech. Abe then headed north to Miyagi to make another speech, by way of Route 6. I drove down the same route the opposite way, to the south to see the current situation of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Alongside Route 6 connecting Soma and Iwaki are the vast areas stricken by the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant crisis. Abe, who heads the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), said in his campaign speech in Soma, "Without Fukushima's reconstruction, there will be no recovery for Japan." Kaieda reportedly told the audience, "When it comes to recovery, there should be no distinction between the ruling and opposition parties." If they are talking about Fukushima's recovery as politicians, why don't they go and see the realities of the disaster areas for themselves? This is why I decided to travel down the route to the south.

Fortunately, Route 6 was opened to traffic in September -- for the first time in 3 1/2 years since the onset of the nuclear catastrophe.



A street in the Odaka district of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, is pictured on Dec. 2, 2014. Although evacuation orders were lifted, the area is void of people in the daytime except for vehicles engaged in reconstruction work. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

My first destination was the Fukushima Prefecture city of Minamisoma -- where I was stationed at the time of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. After witnessing the first tsunami wave, I managed to flee to an inland area. However, a friend of mine -- a reporter with a local newspaper -- perished in the tsunami.

Driving past the city office, which I used to visit for news gathering, I entered the southern part of Minamisoma -- still barred from habitation. Ostensibly, there were no visible scars from the quake disaster along the shopping streets, with the traffic lights signaling normally. But it felt spooky, as if all residents except me had been annihilated.

The next stop was the town of Namie. I dropped in at a store whose curtain read, "Memorabilia on display." Inside the establishment the size of a small supermarket, there were some 400 items that apparently belonged to residents here, including cameras, school bags and stuffed animals.

"It's been almost four years since the disaster, but we find one item after another," said store tender Noboru Kawaguchi, 65. The display space was launched in July by a Tokyo-based construction company undertaking removal of debris in the area. "We would like to return as many items as possible to their owners," company officials thought.

Kawaguchi, a former employee of the Namie Town Office, currently works for the construction company. He washes each item by hand and then measures their radiation doses.

Many of the memorabilia are stuffed animals that have turned a little brownish with mud.



Black bags containing radioactive waste generated from decontamination work are piled up in rice paddies in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, in this picture taken on April 22, 2014. (Mainichi)

拡大写真

"These kinds of things can be identified only by their owners, who are children. Because parents are afraid of radiation exposure and are reluctant to take children here, these items are to remain here forever," he said.

The next town I visited was Futaba. "The difficult-to-return zone starts here," read a sign. The approximately 14-kilometer stretch from Futaba to Tomioka, a town whose radiation levels remain high, had long been closed to traffic. When the national government lifted the traffic regulations in September, it required drivers not to open car windows nor stop their cars along the stretch. Every side road was

blocked with fences, and security guards wearing gas masks were standing at the entrance of roads used by construction vehicles. After driving a while, I saw the emission stacks of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant on the left.

Further down the route, I saw a sign for "Futaba Bara-en" rose garden. It was one of the most distinguished rose gardens in the Tohoku region, thanks to the efforts by garden owner Katsuhide Okada, his father and sons over nearly half a century. Prior to the 2011 disaster, I used to often write about the garden, where some 50 varieties of wild roses and some 120 types of old roses were grown -- rare species originating in the West.

Okada, 70, is now evacuated to Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture. "The rose garden is a complete mess," he said in a dismal voice when I called him. "I want to return to my town and start over, but I wonder when we'll be allowed to go back. My sons say they want to start over in a new place," he said.

My next stop was the town of Naraha. The pastoral landscape this town used to boast is now nowhere in sight. Instead, countless numbers of flexible container bags holding radioactive soil generated from decontamination work are left in the open. At first sight, one might feel as if they wandered into a set for a sci-fi movie that depicts the shattered future.

As I drove down the route toward Iwaki, the words of Kawaguchi in Namie came up to my mind: "We have become used to radiation and container bags. Recovery will only begin when all of them are removed." He also said, "I wanted Abe and Kaieda to drop by here, since they came all the way up to Fukushima." (By Keisaku Jinbo, Tokyo City News Department)

Kepeco mulling second price hike

December 7, 2014

Kepeco plans second price hike for households, companies next spring

JJI

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co. is considering an additional electricity rate hike of more than 10 percent for households next spring, it was learned Saturday.

The company will file an application for approval by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry as early as this month, informed sources said.

It also plans to raise its electricity rates for corporate customers, for which ministry approval is not required.

The rate hikes under consideration are designed to prevent further deterioration of earnings amid uncertainty over when the nuclear reactors owned by the company will be able to be brought back online under the stricter safety standards that were adopted after the March 2011 meltdowns crippled Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant and displaced thousands of people.

If the application is approved, Kansai Electric will be the second power utility after Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to raise electricity rates for a second time since the nuclear crisis began.

In spring 2013, Kansai Electric raised prices by 9.75 percent for households and 17.26 percent for corporate users.

But its earnings have since fallen because the utility has been unable to gain regulatory approval to reactivate reactors 3 and 4 at the Oi nuclear plant and units 3 and 4 at its Takahama nuclear plant, both in Fukui Prefecture.

The margins of the last rate hikes were based on the assumption that the reactors would be restarted soon.

“We can’t avoid raising rates if it is hard for our company to survive without it,” President Makoto Yagi said last month.

The company is expected to suffer a loss for the fourth straight year for fiscal 2014 ending March 31. Kansai Electric aims to stop posting losses by raising rates from the beginning of fiscal 2015 starting April 1.

The company apparently believes it will be able to mollify customers if it promises to lower the rates once the reactors are restarted.

Increased fuel costs force KEPCO to mull household electricity hike of 10 percent

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201412070027>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Amid its failure to restart idled nuclear reactors, Kansai Electric Power Co. is considering raising household electricity rates again by around 10 percent due to the increased fuel costs for thermal power generation, the second such hike in two years.

The utility plans to apply for industry ministry approval to increase the utility tariff by year-end at the earliest.

If the ministry gives the green light, household electricity rates can be increased next spring, depending on how KEPCO proceeds with the tariff hike procedures.

The company is also considering raising the rate for corporate electricity customers at a percentage higher than the hike for household customers.

KEPCO raised the household electricity rate by an average of 9.75 percent in May 2013. The increase was calculated under the scenario that the utility’s four idled nuclear reactors would be restarted after the summer of 2013.

But the company has been unable to receive clearance to restart its reactors so far. The increased fuel costs for thermal power generation has kept KEPCO operating in the red since its reactors were shut down in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The utility is likely to register a loss for the fourth consecutive year in fiscal 2014, which ends March 2015.

The utility said it may be able to reduce electricity rates once it can restart some of its idled reactors at the Takahama and Oi nuclear power plants in Fukui Prefecture.

Among the regional utilities, Hokkaido Electric Power Co. raised household electricity rates by an average of 15.33 percent in November. Tokyo Electric Power Co., the embattled operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, currently has no plans to increase the utility tariff.

What about Fukushima evacuees?

December 5, 2014

Editorial: Politicians have responsibility to offer Fukushima residents optimism

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141205p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Fukushima Prefecture is still struggling to restore areas that have been contaminated with radioactive substances from the tsunami-ravaged nuclear plant and to put victims' lives back in order while being uncertain about the future.

Three years and nine months have passed since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. More than 120,000 people, or one in 16 prefectural residents, are still unable to return home and are taking shelter elsewhere. Of them, approximately 46,000 are living outside Fukushima Prefecture.

Over 2,800 residents of Iitate, roughly half the village population, filed a petition with the government's Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center last month, demanding an increase in the amount of compensation they receive over the disaster, which has forced all residents to take shelter outside the village.

One of the petitioners, a woman who has been living at a temporary housing complex, has told the Mainichi Shimbun, "I think I'm a refugee."

There were political party leaders who delivered their first campaign speeches in Fukushima. However, **candidates and high-ranking officials of political parties are not enthusiastically talking about Fukushima disaster relief and recovery measures during the ongoing campaign for the Dec. 14 general election.**

Evacuees cannot help but wonder when they can go home, and where they should settle down if they cannot return. **All political parties and individual candidates should waste no time in showing a clear road map toward putting Fukushima evacuees' lives back in order to prevent these victims from becoming rootless wanderers.**

At the end of last year, the government announced its policy of speeding up Fukushima's disaster recovery but gave up its goal of ensuring all evacuees return home. It is a realistic decision since there are areas where evacuation orders cannot be lifted in the foreseeable future. However, those who cannot return where they used to live need new jobs, new residences and certain amounts of compensation. The government has not played an appropriate role in supporting these evacuees.

A typical example is the **failure to settle disputes over compensation.** Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has kept rejecting recommendations for settlements by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center, which is a government body. For instance, TEPCO has not complied with recommendations by the center that the utility increase the amount of compensation for mental anguish to each of some 15,000 residents of Namie by 50,000 yen a month. The issue of compensation has cast a shadow over evacuees' enthusiasm about returning home. Residents of some evacuation zones in the city of Tamura and the village of Kawauchi were split over the government's decision to lift evacuation orders earlier this year. This is apparently because **TEPCO is expected to stop paying compensation to evacuees one year after evacuation orders are lifted in principle.** Whether evacuees aim to return home by all means or give up such hope depends on the generations of evacuees and their family composition -- particularly whether they have young children among other factors.

Legislation to support the livelihoods of children and other victims of the disasters was proposed the year before last as a lawmaker-initiated bill, and unanimously passed into law. The law is aimed primarily at respecting the will of residents, returnees and evacuees and supporting their livelihoods.

Those affected by the disasters see this move as politicians' rejection of the government's bureaucratic methods based on the assumption that all the evacuees would return home. However, the law has rarely been applied to support disaster victims.

In particular, residents need support for their efforts to secure housing. It is the role of politicians to convince Fukushima residents that they have a bright future.

December 05, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

"Tohoku cans": Don't forget us

December 9, 2014

Student peddling Fukushima air to revive interest in nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412090007>

By AKEMI HARADA/ Staff Writer

A teenager is selling cans of "Fukushima air" to shock the public into reviving debate over the 2011 nuclear disaster.

"I want to try to surprise people and renew interest in the nuclear accident," said Atsu, a 17-year-old high school student in the Tokyo city of Machida who also works as a painter.

During his summer vacation, Atsu headed to Fukushima Prefecture's coastal area to collect air for his "Tohoku Cans." Before injecting the air, he measures the radiation levels in the air with two dosimeters to verify its safety.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011, Atsu joined the reconstruction assistance effort. An avid painter since the fifth grade in elementary school, he gave donations to the Japanese Red Cross using proceeds from sales of wristbands and other goods he made and his paintings.

He has continued to solicit donations but recently heard some negative remarks about his endeavor. Some said the Fukushima evacuees no longer needed assistance. Others suggested that Atsu was just seeking publicity for himself.

Atsu said he came up with the idea to sell canned Fukushima air to shed new light on the continuing crisis at the nuclear plant and providing assistance for reconstruction of the Tohoku region.

"I'll try selling Fukushima air," he said he thought at the time. "I'm sure it'll attract both support and criticism and spur debate. And debate will generate interest."

The Japanese government has set a long-term decontamination target of 1 millisievert or lower for radiation exposure per year in areas around the nuclear plant, apart from the natural background radiation dose. This amounts to 0.23 microsievert per hour.

The air Atsu collected in Fukushima Prefecture has shown readings between 0.05 and 0.09 microsievert per hour, below the limit. In comparison, radiation levels in Tokyo's Shinjuku district are around 0.03 microsievert per hour.

Atsu says the Tohoku Cans have another meaning.

"While the public seems to think that the nuclear accident is in the past, people tend to shun vegetables produced in Fukushima Prefecture," he said. "So, the Fukushima disaster is not really over. I wanted to express something that words cannot convey."

When Atsu started his project in Fukushima Prefecture, local residents approached him. When he explained the purpose of the cans, the residents were pleased and thanked him.

"I want people to know that radiation levels here are not that different from Tokyo's," one resident said.

Atsu had sold around 50 Tohoku Cans as of Nov. 11, mainly at art events around the country that he attended as a painter. He also takes orders through his blog.

Most of the buyers praise Atsu's efforts. Bovgatei, a gallery in the Tateshina district in Chino, Nagano Prefecture, sold 24 Tohoku Cans when Atsu held a solo exhibition there in September.

The gallery's owner, painter Yumiko Takayama, said, "Many people were impressed by Atsu's passion to remind us of the nuclear issue we seemed to have forgotten about."

Still, Atsu said, "I thought there would be more criticism."

Some buyers are apparently reluctant to open the cans.

The Tohoku Cans, which contain a short message inside, sell for 600 yen (\$5) each. All proceeds are donated to the Japanese Red Cross. Orders can be made via e-mail (tohoku.air@gmail.com).

Reveal the names

December 12, 2014

Court orders ministry to identify municipalities in survey on storing 3/11 debris

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201412120062

By SHUNSUKE ABE/ Staff Writer

OSAKA--The Osaka District Court ordered the Environment Ministry to reveal the names of local governments that agreed to accept or considered accepting debris from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

The court on Dec. 11 struck down the government's decision to keep the names of the municipalities under wraps out of concern that disclosure could hamper waste transfer projects.

Presiding Judge Kenji Tanaka said **citizens have the right to know if debris from the triple disaster of the earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear accident would be stored in their communities.**

"Local residents were concerned that disaster waste could be contaminated with radioactive materials," Tanaka said.

According to the ruling, the ministry surveyed municipalities in 43 of Japan's 47 prefectures in October 2011 on their willingness to accept the waste. The three disaster-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, plus Okinawa Prefecture, were excluded from the survey.

Although the ministry released the answers from 54 local governments that responded to the survey, it did not provide their names.

A citizens group in Moriguchi, Osaka Prefecture, filed a lawsuit demanding the ministry disclose the names. The ministry argued that it did not release the names "for fear of eroding neutrality in decision-making (on whether to accept the waste)."

Judge Tanaka said the potential disadvantages caused by the nondisclosure would have been enormous.

"We corrected the government's stance on information disclosure," Sugiko Hashimoto, head of the Moriguchi citizens group, told reporters in Osaka after the court's ruling.

The Environment Ministry said in a statement, "We will consider a response to the matter after inspecting the content of the ruling."

S.Korean fishing experts in Fukushima

December 12, 2014

S.Korean experts to visit Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141212_24.html

Dec. 12, 2014 - Updated 05:48 UTC+1

Japan's fisheries ministry says South Korea will send experts to Japan to study the validity of a ban on fisheries imports from Fukushima and 7 other prefectures.

The ministry said on Friday that 7 experts will visit Japan from Monday through Friday and conduct a field survey related to the ban and other import restrictions.

Since September last year, South Korea has banned fish imports from the 8 prefectures that suffered contamination after the nuclear accident in 2011.

The country also requires the submission of test certificates if even a trace of radioactivity is found in imports from anywhere in Japan.

The experts will visit Fukushima Prefecture on Wednesday and Thursday. **They will check how test fishing is being carried out and see how workers at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant are trying to prevent leaks of contaminated water into the Pacific.**

The experts will visit Japan again next month and compile a report on whether to continue the measures.

Japan has urged South Korea to revoke the ban, complaining that it is excessive and lacks scientific evidence.

Korean fishing experts in Japan

Decembre 15, 2014

S.Korean experts study Japanese fish import ban

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 15, 2014 - Updated 05:29 UTC+1

South Korean experts have begun a field study in Japan to determine whether Seoul should keep its import ban on seafood from Fukushima and seven other prefectures. Fukushima Prefecture hosts the damaged nuclear power plant.

The seven-member research group set up by South Korea's government visited Japan's agriculture and fisheries ministry in Tokyo on Monday.

Fisheries Agency chief Kazuyoshi Honkawa told the group the agency is monitoring marine products strictly to ensure that only safe seafood circulates at home and abroad. He asked them to fully examine Japan's safety measures and file an appropriate report with their home government.

The experts replied that South Korean consumers are highly concerned about the issue of food safety. They said they will scrutinize the procedures Japanese fisheries workers use for handling products and

their findings will be reflected in their decision on whether to end the import ban.

During the five-day fact-finding trip, the group will visit the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant **to see how workers are trying to prevent radioactive water from leaking into the sea**. They also plan to watch test fishing off Fukushima Prefecture. The experts are to visit other prefectures in a second trip next month.

South Korea has banned seafood imports from Fukushima and seven other prefectures since September last year.

Debris collecting starts in Futaba

December 17, 2014

Debris removal begins along coast of Futaba town

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141217_28.html

Dec. 17, 2014 - Updated 09:00 UTC+1

Work to remove debris from the March 2011 tsunami has begun along the coast of Futaba Town in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture. An evacuation order is still in place for the town since the accident there at the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Japan's government is responsible for removing the debris.

On Wednesday morning, government-appointed workers began clearing the roughly 200-hectare area. They loaded driftwood and housing material onto trucks using construction machinery, and took it to a provisional storage site.

The Environment Ministry estimates the amount of debris in the area at 5,500 tons. The area is designated for preparation for the lifting of the evacuation order, where radiation levels there are relatively low.

Removal of the debris would enable decontamination work and hopefully speed up the area's reconstruction.

Debris clearing starts in Futaba, more than 3½ years after tsunami

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/17/national/debris-clearing-starts-futaba-3%C2%BD-years-tsunami/#.VJGf-P-cjA>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Workers started clearing debris on Wednesday in some parts of Futaba near the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, nearly four years after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis.

Fukushima Prefecture town is in the evacuation zone around the crippled nuclear plant.

The Environment Ministry plans to remove 13,000 tons of debris by March 2016 in areas designated to prepare for the lifting of the evacuation order. No such plan is in place for other areas of the town due to higher radiation levels.

After a silent tribute to victims of the disaster, ministry officials and other people launched the operation using heavy machinery in the Morotake area.

"At last, Futaba town's reconstruction begins," said Rokuro Saito, 77, a community leader in Morotake. Saito has been living in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, in the wake of the disaster.

Kepeco eyeing second price rise

December 17, 2014

Citing idled nuclear reactors, Kansai Electric eyes another price hike

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412170043>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

With all of its reactors offline, Kansai Electric Power Co. is moving to raise household electricity rates **for the second time** after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster to cover higher fuel costs from thermal power generation.

The utility said Dec. 17 it will apply to the industry ministry for approval to raise the household electricity rate in April after it decides on the extent of increase.

"It is a tough decision, but we have no other choice," Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi told a news conference.

The company is expected to post a fourth consecutive loss for the year ending next March. Before the Fukushima disaster, the utility depended on nuclear power for 45 percent of the electricity it generated. The company will also increase the rate for corporate users in April, a move that does not require government approval.

If the ministry approves the hike, Kansai Electric will be the second regional power company to increase electricity rates twice since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Kansai Electric raised its household electricity rate in May 2013 for the first time in 33 years by an average of 9.75 percent. The increase was calculated based on the assumption that the utility's four idled nuclear reactors would be restarted after summer 2013.

Although the Nuclear Regulation Authority gave provisional safety clearance on Dec. 17 to two reactors at the company's Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, the utility decided the rate hike was necessary because of the slow progress in restarting all four reactors.

In November, Hokkaido Electric Power Co. raised household electricity rates by an average of 15.33 percent, its second rate increase since the disaster.

Not all evacuees have claimed compensation yet

December 18, 2014

3,700 Fukushima evacuees running out of time to claim compensation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/18/national/3700-fukushima-evacuees-running-out-of-time-to-claim-compensation/>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Some 3,700 of those forced to flee during the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011 have yet to exercise their right to claim compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co., a company executive said Thursday.

Tepco has received claims for provisional compensation from some 166,000 evacuees who fled coastal areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant because of the triple core meltdown.

Of them, 3,713 had yet to apply for full compensation as of the end of November, Tepco Executive Vice President Yoshiyuki Ishizaki said in an interview.

While that's half what it was a year earlier, **Tepco is still unable to confirm the whereabouts of some 400 evacuees. In addition, there are some 750 who have not even applied for provisional compensation**, according to Ishizaki, head of Tepco's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters.

"With cooperation from local authorities, we are making progress in confirming the whereabouts of people who have yet to make claims," Ishizaki said. The company plans to visit the individuals and advise them to make claims soon, he said.

The company plans to continue to accept all claims under its compensation program for the time being, though the statute of limitations may have expired in some cases, he said.

Who will pay the costs of decommissioning?

December 17, 2014

Power rates to reflect decommissioning costs even after deregulation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412170064>

By TOMOYOSHI OTSU/ Staff Writer

Regional utilities will be allowed to pass on costs to consumers for decommissioning nuclear power plants even after the retail sale of electricity to households is liberalized in 2016, according to sources.

The move proposed by the industry ministry reflects concerns that it could be difficult for the utilities to raise funds for decommissioning work if the liberalization produces fierce competition among electricity suppliers, the sources said.

However, the ministry could find itself being criticized for giving favorable treatment to regional electric power companies that have nuclear power plants even though its intention is to make decommissioning go smoothly, the sources added.

Costs for decommissioning nuclear power plants are already added to electricity bills. This is set to continue because liberalization of the market in 2016 will ramp up competition among electricity suppliers, and this could make it difficult for the major electric power companies to generate sufficient profits to carry out decommissioning work.

Companies that will spin off from the major electric power companies between 2018 and 2020 to specialize in transmitting electricity will collect costs for decommissioning work.

These companies, which will still be under the umbrellas of the regional utilities, will add decommissioning costs to electric cable use fees paid by electricity sales companies, which collect electricity bills from individual households.

While the ministry wants all electricity sales companies to shoulder the burden of costs for decommissioning, some of the new firms may decide to specialize in sales of electricity from renewable energy sources to consumers who are opposed to nuclear power generation.

In that event, those companies would sharply oppose being required to bear some of costs for decommissioning work.

To get round the problem, the ministry may decide that only firms selling electricity from nuclear power plants will shoulder the burden.

In the case of a mid-sized reactor that can generate 800 megawatts of electricity, the costs for decommissioning range from 44 billion yen to 62 billion yen (\$377 million to \$532 million). The costs include plant dismantlement and radioactive waste disposal.

Revival projects

December 19, 2014

Govt. selects 1st post-disaster town revival plan

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 19, 2014 - Updated 09:11 UTC+1

The Japanese government has selected the first project for a subsidy program to help revive local communities devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita said on Friday that the government chose the project to build a commercial complex in Onagawa Town, Miyagi Prefecture, northeastern Japan.

Under the program launched in March, the government will provide subsidies to projects to revive shopping areas if they incorporate community facilities.

Takeshita said the planned complex in Onagawa will play a key role in the town's project to create a compact community in its central area.

He expressed hope that the project will restore briskness to the tsunami-hit town.

Town authorities plan to build the complex on raised ground near JR Onagawa Station.

The Reconstruction Ministry says the government will shoulder about 70 percent of the estimated cost of 5.6 million dollars.

The commercial complex is scheduled to open in late 2015.

Evacuees file new suit against TEPCO

December 19, 2014

Nuclear disaster evacuees sue TEPCO

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 19, 2014 - Updated 11:49 UTC+1

People who were evacuated from **Minami-soma** City in northeastern Japan have sued Tokyo Electric Power Company. Damages of more than 6.8 billion yen, or 57 million dollars, are sought for being forced to leave their hometown due to the 2011 nuclear accident.

The city in Fukushima Prefecture is located about 20 kilometers from the damaged plant.

On Friday, 340 residents of the city's Odaka district filed suit with the Tokyo District Court against TEPCO. The entire district is designated as a no-entry zone and residents still must live elsewhere three years and nine months after the accident.

The damages the evacuees are demanding include a doubling of the monthly evacuation compensation per capita of around 1,700 dollars and about 84,000 dollars per head for destruction of the basis for living conditions.

They claim they have been deprived of their ancestral land and history and that residents' bonds have been totally severed.

Isao Enei, who heads the plaintiffs' group, told reporters that the nuclear accident has deprived them of their hometowns, prevented family gatherings, and undermined even their lives. He also said evacuees are under greater stress.

TEPCO said in a statement that the utility will deal with the suit in earnest after hearing the plaintiffs' claims in court.

Fuel removal work at No.4 completed

December 21, 2014

Risk in Fukushima No. 4 reactor mitigated as last of nuclear fuel removed

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412210014>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Tokyo Electric Power Co. removed the last four nuclear fuel assemblies that remained in the No. 4 reactor building of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant from its storage pool on Dec. 20.

The No. 4 reactor was offline at the time of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. However, an explosion occurred in the building four days later, seriously damaging it.

After the accident, experts pointed to the risk of nuclear fuel in the pool melting from insufficient cooling and releasing a large amount of radioactive materials. However, the threat has been mitigated with the removal of the last assemblies.

On Dec. 20, TEPCO allowed the media to watch the removal work.

Workers pulled up from the pool a cask containing the last four unspent nuclear fuel assemblies. They plan to transfer it to the No. 6 reactor building, which sustained relatively minor damage in the disaster, within a few days after decontaminating the outside of the cask.

The transfer will mean that all of the nuclear fuel in the No. 4 building has been removed from the building as scheduled by year-end.

The pool had held a total of 1,535 nuclear fuel assemblies, which consisted of 1,331 spent and 204 unspent nuclear fuel assemblies.

TEPCO started the removal of those assemblies from the pool in November 2013 after installing a new roof and a crane on the building. The removal of spent nuclear fuel assemblies concluded in November this year.

There will be no work in the No. 4 reactor building for the time being. TEPCO will be engaged in efforts at the No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 reactor buildings and in dealing with the growing volume of contaminated water partly resulting from efforts to keep the reactors from overheating.

(This article was written by Yu Kotsubo and Hiromi Kumai.)

Nuclear fuel removal operation finishes at Fukushima No. 4 reactor

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141220p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) removed the final four fuel rods from the spent fuel pool in the No. 4 reactor building at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on Dec. 20 -- one year ahead of schedule.

The timeline for the spent fuel removal project was moved up due to worries over whether the No. 4 reactor building -- heavily damaged by a hydrogen explosion following the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami -- could withstand earthquakes.

The No. 4 reactor was undergoing a regular inspection when the disasters struck, so the fuel was not in the core at the time. A total of 1,535 fuel rods were inside of the unit's nuclear fuel pool -- 1,331 of which were spent fuel, and 204 were unused -- the highest number among all of the four damaged reactors at the Fukushima plant.

TEPCO began the operation to remove the extremely radioactive spent fuel in November 2013, and finished transferring them to a separate pool in November of this year before subsequently beginning removing the unused fuel. A TEPCO representative commented, "We'd like to use this experience with reactor No. 4 as a model for the other reactors."

While contaminated machinery from the time of the accident remains inside the No. 4 reactor building, removing it remains a low priority and there are no plans to do so yet.

Meanwhile, residents of six areas evacuated following the meltdowns will be allowed to stay overnight in their homes for the holiday season. Residents are usually only permitted to visit during daylight hours. According to the government's nuclear emergency response headquarters, overnight stays will be allowed for the 30-day period from Dec. 20 through Jan. 18 for residents from the village of Iitate, the city of Minamisoma, the town of Kawamata and the village of Katsurao; for the 9-day period from Dec. 27 through Jan. 4 for residents from the village of Kawauchi; and for the 15-day period from Dec. 24 through Jan. 7 for residents from the town of Naraha. Some 9,880 households and 26,740 residents are eligible for the holiday overnight stay program. Meanwhile, residents from those areas designated "difficult-to-return zones," where yearly radiation levels are above 50 millisieverts, are not eligible.

December 20, 2014

All spent fuel removed from reactor 4 pool at Fukushima No. 1, Tepco says

Kyodo

Tepco said Saturday it has finished removing all fuel rods from the spent-fuel pool in the shattered reactor 4 building at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, in a rare piece of positive news from the decommissioning process.

A total of 1,535 fuel rod assemblies, comprising 1,331 deemed at risk and 204 that were unused, have been transferred to other buildings following a yearlong process by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the beleaguered operator of the wrecked plant.

According to Tepco, this will reduce the risk of the spent fuel rods being exposed in the event of a new earthquake or a major accident.

"Completion of the removal work is a milestone and I feel deeply about it," plant chief Akira Ono told reporters, while stressing that the decommissioning of Fukushima No. 1 remains an extremely lengthy process.

The overall cleanup and dismantling of the plant, an operation that is expected to take decades, has been delayed by a relentless on-site buildup of toxic radioactive water.

Reactor 4 avoided a core meltdown when the tsunami spawned by the March 11, 2011, earthquake ripped through the No. 1 plant, as the unit was offline for a regular inspection and all of its fuel was stored in the pool on the upper level of the building.

But the building was torn apart by a hydrogen explosion just days later as the enormity of the nuclear crisis was only just becoming apparent. The over 1,500 fuel rod assemblies that continued to be stored at the top of the devastated structure had remained a major source of concern, in Japan and overseas.

Tepco hopes to begin extracting the fuel from the reactor 3 spent-fuel pool in the next fiscal year beginning in April, and to begin the same operation at reactor 1 during fiscal 2017. But it is unknown whether the work will follow that schedule given the sky-high radiation levels that continue to plague reactors 1 through 3, which each suffered core meltdowns, and which put the levels clocked in reactor 4 in the shade.

Remembrance



Parents of missing police officer Yuta Sato visit a destroyed patrol car left behind in the Hotokehama district of Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture, on Nov. 8. (Yasuo Kojima)

December 21, 2014

Fukushima gathering objects to remember 2011 quake, tsunami, nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412210022>

By YASUO KOJIMA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Although the top is completely gone and the rest of the vehicle a rusting hulk, a police car that helped save lives from the tsunami spawned by the Great East Japan Earthquake will be preserved as a memorial.

The Tomioka town assembly on Dec. 16 received a report that the town government decided to save the patrol car that was engulfed by the tsunami on March 11, 2011, and resulted in its two occupants killed or missing.

"We want to convey to future generations not only the damage to the patrol car but also the police officers who saved the lives of many residents of our town without regard for the danger," said a town government official.

Residents of Fukushima Prefecture have finally begun to collect objects for preservation that reflect the destruction and turmoil brought about by the earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis.

Unlike in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, which were also devastated by the tsunami, the collection effort has been delayed in Fukushima Prefecture because radiation levels were high in many areas due to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In addition, work to clear the rubble contaminated with radioactive materials has been slow.

But many reminders in the prefecture show not only the damage from the tsunami, but also the dire situation that forced many residents to quickly flee their houses, schools or workplaces as the nuclear accident unfolded.

Now, people are actively engaged in their collection in order to convey these “silent witnesses” to the disaster to future generations.

Immediately after the earthquake, two police officers in Tomioka jumped into the patrol car to urge residents to evacuate to safer ground. Yoichi Masuko, 41, one of the two, was later found dead while the other, Yuta Sato, then 24, is still missing.

The vehicle was later found near a beach in the Hotokehama district of Tomioka.

Sato’s parents, who live in the city of Fukushima, have visited the destroyed patrol car around the 11th day of every month.

“If the car is left as is, it will rust away and wind up as rubble,” said his father, Yasuhiro, 56.

“Though our memories of the disaster (from the tsunami) wane, we should not forget them. It is a good thing to preserve the car,” he added.

The two police officers were off duty that day and were visiting the Futaba Police Station to receive their personnel transfer orders.

Soon after, a major tremor rocked the police station. They immediately headed for a residential area near the coast, though the huge tsunami was approaching.

The Fukushima prefectural police planned to dispose of the vehicle. However, a group of Tomioka residents petitioned the town government and the Futaba Police Station to preserve it. The town government received the car from the prefectural police on Dec. 1.

The town government plans to take corrosion-proofing measures on the vehicle and then display it in a children’s park next to the police station within this fiscal year, which ends in March 2015.

The efforts will be assisted by the action committee of the “Fukushima Shinsai Isan Hozen Project” (Project to preserve objects from the Fukushima earthquake disaster), which consists of eight organizations, including the prefectural Fukushima Museum in the city of Aizu-Wakamatsu.

The committee, formed in April this year, began to collect objects in the following month that show dire circumstances brought about by the disaster and the nuclear crisis.

With about 6 million yen (\$50,190) in subsidies from the Cultural Affairs Agency, its members are looking into coastal areas this fiscal year. If they find suitable items, they measure their radiation levels. If they confirm that those objects are safe, they collect them.

The committee has already gathered about 100 objects. They include a clock at a beauty parlor in Tomioka, which stopped at 2:46 p.m., the time of the disaster; a toppled signboard of the Ukedo Elementary School in Namie; a stack of newspapers dated March 12, 2011, the day after the disaster, which were not distributed to customers and remained at a newspaper sales agent office.

The committee plans to continue the collection for three years from this fiscal year. It will also hold a meeting on its activities and display collected objects in two places in the prefecture during the period from February to March 2015.

All the residents in Tomioka were ordered to evacuate to safer municipalities due to the nuclear accident. Starting in March 2013, however, they have been allowed to re-enter their town only in the daytime.

“In Fukushima Prefecture, levels of radiation in the air and from objects were high in areas damaged by the disaster. Because of that, we hesitated to collect them. But now, a growing number of residents have been entering the damaged areas. So it has become possible to collect the objects,” said Mitsuru Takahashi, 44, a senior curator of the Fukushima Museum.

“We want to preserve as much as possible the objects that are reminders of people’s daily lives and jobs, which were lost due to the nuclear accident, and serve as witnesses of the tsunami and the nuclear crisis,” he added.

Last of hotspot advisories to be lifted



December 20, 2014

Govt. to lift last 'hot spot' evacuation advisory

Dec. 21, 2014 - Updated 04:32 UTC+1

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141221_11.html

The Japanese government is set to lift the last of its evacuation advisories in Fukushima Prefecture for so-called "hot spots" with high radiation levels.

Officials are expected to convey the decision to the residents of Minamisoma City on Sunday.

The decision would affect 152 households in the city, located about 20 kilometers from the disabled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Authorities issued the hot-spot advisories 3 years ago for individual houses. **They are separate from evacuation zones, which remain in force.**

The government earlier planned to lift the hot spot designation in Minamisoma by the end of October, saying radiation levels have gone below its standards.

But the plan met opposition from residents who complained the area was not yet safe for living in.

Government officials say they have since gained the understanding of local governments. They say they have decided to lift the advisories on December 28th.

Some residents are still concerned about radiation levels. Officials say if requested they will continue the decontamination work that is currently underway.

They also say residents will continue to receive monthly compensation of about 835 dollars from Tokyo Electric Power Company until March next year for their stress and suffering.

75%of radioactivity released after first 4 days

December 21, 2014

More radioactive materials released after crisis

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141221_16.html

Dec. 21, 2014 - Updated 17:15 UTC+1

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency says 75 percent of the radioactive substances released from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant came more than 4 days after the accident.

The government's investigation has not released what happened during this period. Experts say **the reason needs to be determined as to why massive amounts of radioactive materials continued to be released for a prolonged period.**

The nuclear accident in Fukushima has been evaluated as the worst, at level 7, on a par with the Chernobyl accident in 1986, due to the large amount of radioactive substances that were released. But **the details on how the substances were released remain unknown.**

A research group at the Japan Atomic Energy Agency collected new data on radiation detected near the plant over time to analyze how radioactive materials were released into the air.

The research has found that an estimated 470,000 terabecquerels of radioactive substances had been

released by the end of March 2011, when the discharge is believed to have mostly subsided.

The research group says 25 percent of the radioactive materials were released during the first 4 days of the accident, as the meltdown and hydrogen explosions were happening, while 75 percent were released over the 2-week period that followed.

The group also analyzed how the radioactive materials spread, using the climate data at the time. They found that contamination in places where former residents are still not allowed to return became serious on March 15th -- 4 days after the accident.

They also say **radioactive substances released between March 20th and 21st spread to a wider area, including the Kanto region, and are believed to have contaminated drinking water supplies.**

The outcome of the analyses indicates that radioactive materials continued to be released after the first 4 days, which is believed to be the critical time during which the situation was deteriorating out of control.

The government's investigation has focused on the first 4 days, and has not determined the cause of the massive release of radioactive substances following that period.

Masamichi Chino of the research group says the cause needs to be determined to prevent future accidents and to bring the situation under control quickly if another accident happens.

More than 120,000 people are still forced to live in temporary shelters.

Six municipalities remain off limits due to high levels of contamination.

All radiation hotspots "safe"?

December 22, 2014

Small radiation hot spots in Fukushima to be declared safe

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/22/national/small-radiation-hot-spots-in-fukushima-to-be-declared-safe/#.VJhcl_cJA

JJI

Sunday, officials will lift an evacuation advisory for 142 locations in the city of Minamisoma, which will affect 152 households, Yosuke Takagi, state minister of economy, trade and industry, said this weekend during a briefing to residents.

Amid complaints from residents, Takagi said the decision was based on rules that allow hot spot designations to be lifted once radiation levels fall following decontamination work.

In June 2011, three months after the triple reactor meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the government designated 260 places in the cities of Minamisoma and Date and the village of Kawauchi as hot spots where annual radiation doses for residents could exceed 20 millisieverts. Evacuations were advised.

Date and Kawauchi were declared free of hot spots in December 2012.

In October this year, the government indicated it would add Minamisoma to the list within the month. But it postponed doing so amid concerns among residents that radiation levels remained high.

New panel of experts for Fukushima communities

December 22, 2014

Panel to discuss future of Fukushima communities

Dec. 22, 2014 - Updated 02:39 UTC+1

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141222_12.html

Japan's Reconstruction Agency is setting up a panel of experts to discuss the future of 12 municipalities around the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The panel will hold its first meeting in the city of Fukushima on Tuesday. Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita will also attend the meeting.

The panel members will include Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori, academics and business men. The President of the Science Council of Japan, Takashi Onishi, will head the panel.

The eight-member panel will discuss how measures should be implemented by 2020 to rebuild infrastructure and communities, and promote businesses.

It will also consider what the municipalities will be like in 30 to 40 years based on changes in Japan's demography and industrial structure.

The panel will compile proposals by next summer.

"Kageboshi Fukushima Kiko: Hana wa sakedomo"



December 22, 2014

Yamagata farmer-singers write song for nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima residents

Kotaro Endo, left, and other Kageboshi members put on a show and play their song for Fukushima Prefecture, in Tokyo's Nerima Ward, on Nov. 21, 2014. (Mainichi)
<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141221p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Amateur folk music group "Kageboshi," made up of local farmers in Yamagata Prefecture, has created a song dedicated to residents in Fukushima Prefecture, who continue to suffer from the nuclear power plant disaster.

The song is included on a CD which was released with a booklet titled "Kageboshi Fukushima Kiko: Hana wa sakedomo" (Kageboshi Fukushima travelogue: Though the flowers bloom) on March 11, 2014 -- the third anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The group included an English version of their original song "Even Though the Flowers Bloom," so singers from both home and abroad could try the tune. A passage from the song goes like this:

"Tokyo could not care less about those who have been forced out of their hometowns.

Does the city not have a heart to ache over the tragedy its own electric power has caused?"

The group Kageboshi was formed in 1975 by Kotaro Endo, 62, Yoshikazu Yokozawa, 61, and other farmers in the Yamagata Prefecture city of Nagai. One of their best known songs is "Shirakawa Ihoku Hitoyama Hyakumon" released in 1991 -- named after an old insult about the Tohoku region, meaning that mountains in the north of Shirakawa (in today's Fukushima Prefecture) are only worth 100 Japanese mon each.

The song depicts the complicated relationship between the Tokyo metropolitan area and the Tohoku region, which can be read in a line that goes:

"They forced dangerous technology like nuclear power on us and degraded our land."

The group put together the CD and booklet to show support for Fukushima residents as fellow Tohoku natives, and performed the song at shows in Tokyo, Shizuoka, Kanazawa and other cities across the country in November.

"Of course the flowers bloom even in the disaster-hit areas, but there are those who cannot see them blossom as they are still living away from home," Endo said.

The group plans to tour the country playing the song. A companion booklet includes photos taken by Kenichi Hasegawa, a dairy farmer from Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, where residents are still unable to return after the nuclear disaster. The CD/booklet is now on sale for 1,500 yen. For more information, contact Kageboshi at 0238-84-6445 (in Japanese).

Feeling isolated and anxious about radiation

December 26, 2014

INTERVIEW/ Yukihiro Kayama: Experts should help Fukushima mothers speak up about radiation fears

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201412260004>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Psychiatrist Yukihiro Kayama said it is becoming more embarrassing, with the passage of time since the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011, for mothers in Fukushima Prefecture to casually discuss their fears of radiation.

In a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Kayama attributed the trend to a "division" within the population of Fukushima Prefecture, whereby a divergence in their lifestyles according to their residential areas, available economic resources and other factors has made it difficult for them to relate to each other's feelings.

He proposed meetings of experts with small audiences of residents, where participants could feel at ease talking about their own experiences, concerns and other problems. That would ease the speakers' emotions to a certain extent, Kayama said.

Excerpts of the interview follow:

* * *

Question: You and your colleagues surveyed, between late 2013 and January, some 250 mothers of infants aged between 3 and 6 in the prefectural capital of Fukushima, which showed that 24 percent of the respondents were strongly depressed. What can you say about that?

Kayama: Depression rates are usually around 15 percent in similar surveys conducted in Japan. We found **the more you were concerned about the effects of radiation on your children's health, the more depressed you tended to be.**

We also found that **depression was being caused by a sense that you are out of sync with others in how you perceive the effects of radiation.**

Q: The city of Fukushima lies tens of kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and has never been included in evacuation orders. What do you say to that?

A: The additional post-disaster radiation dose, above and beyond natural background levels that have nothing to do with the nuclear disaster, is under 1 millisievert per year as long as you lead a normal life in the city of Fukushima. That is less than one-half the annual background dose, but that still makes some people anxious.

The level of anxiety differs from person to person. Some don't allow their children to eat food products from Fukushima because that makes them afraid, and don't allow their children to play outdoors, either. Others do worry about food but don't worry about playing outdoors. Still others don't worry about either.

Q: And those individual differences in the level of anxiety are leading to the sense that you are out of sync with others, right?

A: Yes. You wonder, for example, if you will not be taken for being too nervous if you drive your child to a day-care center because you are afraid of radiation exposure along the way, or if you will not be considered too insensitive if you feed your child with food products from Fukushima Prefecture. The different levels of anxiety about radiation exposure manifest themselves in how differently from others you behave in your everyday life. That makes you feel isolated and anxious and causes depression. Anxiety about radiation exposure can differ between husband and wife or between parent and child, who may have different ideas about evacuation, too. That has caused friction or divorce among some couples.

Q: As a resident of the city of Fukushima myself, I used to believe that people no longer talk about radiation that often these days probably because they no longer care. What do you think?

A: Officials at one day-care center in the city of Fukushima thought about no longer holding an annual lecture session by a radiologist this summer because few parents were talking about radiation anymore. When they surveyed the parents just to be sure, they found, to their surprise, that a majority of the parents wanted to attend a lecture session if it is held.

They said parents wanted to ask an expert questions such as, can't you get radiation from a bruise suffered from a tumble, is it safe to have licked a toy with sandbox earth on it, and will it be safe to continue raising your child in the city of Fukushima.

Q: Why, then, do people talk less often about radiation?

A: For one thing, people consciously keep from talking about radiation because many of them have found their own ways of coming to terms with radiation in their lives. But rather, I think it is truer to say that, with the passage of time since the nuclear disaster, it is becoming more embarrassing to talk about radiation at all.

That is partly because you are afraid you could be taken for being eccentric if you don't react to radiation concerns the way others do. Some are concerned they could be taken for nervous ones who still worry about radiation if they just mentioned the topic of radiation.

You also tend to keep your mouth shut when you don't know the background of the people you are talking to.

Let's say you evacuated from the city of Fukushima to somewhere outside the prefecture of your own volition with your child. You want to share the hardships you had to endure away from home, but it would be embarrassing to do so if the person you are talking to came from an evacuation zone and has no way of returning to her home.

When you begin thinking this way and that like this, you can no longer open your mouth.

Q: I have been told that you can share your experiences more easily with people from outside Fukushima Prefecture than with people from within. What do you think?

A: Things were not like that until about half a year after the nuclear disaster. Residents of Fukushima Prefecture were able to share their accounts of hardships, like how frightened they were during the early phase of the disaster, with outright sympathy for each other. **With the passage of time, however, their lifestyles have diverged according to the locations of their homes, the economic resources of their families and other factors, which has precluded mutual sympathy and has divided the population.**

The reparations being paid by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the nuclear plant operator, is also engendering disparity. Residents from evacuation zones receive 100,000 yen (\$840) per month per head, which means a family of four is entitled to receive 400,000 yen a month. Everyone is not happy with that, however, so slanderous fliers have been tossed into temporary housing for people from evacuation zones, and cars with license plates from areas close to the nuclear plant have been honked at by following cars while driving in the city of Fukushima.

It is becoming more awkward to touch on private issues in general. It may appear on the surface that the lives of Fukushima Prefecture's residents are settling down, but I suppose the bonds of fellow community members have been hurt deep down, so they can no longer find common values or topics that they can share.

Q: Do you think there are ways to turn things around for the better?

A: During the early phase of the disaster, a majority of Fukushima Prefecture's residents, including doctors like myself, knew almost nothing about radiation. That is why lecture sessions, where radiologists spoke to large audiences, were useful. But **the issue of radiation exposure has been individualized now.** Talking about kinds of greatest common measures at public lectures would no longer help dissolve anxiety. I think it would be more effective for experts to hold meetings with small audiences of residents so both parties can better recognize each other.

Q: You have been assisting a self-help group of people with eating disorders for more than 20 years by holding group meetings with patients and their family members. Do you have any advice to give from that?

A: My experiences with the group meetings indicate **it is essential to have participants suffering from anxiety talk at length about their own experiences, concerns and other problems, instead of having experts give one-sided talks.** Just talking eases the speakers' emotions to a certain extent. If anyone in the group has had similar experiences, a show of mutual sympathy can give comfort to the speakers.

Q: Do you mean down-to-earth efforts to hold small meetings would pay off better in the end?

A: Exactly. But that rests on the basic premise of mutual trust between the radiologists, health professionals and other providers of support and the Fukushima Prefecture residents who come to the meetings. If there is no trust, the residents won't listen, and they won't speak their minds. Experts and other providers of support should make sure they are ready to wholly accept what other people are and will always be on their side.

Some people worry about radiation doses that cannot have any health impact from a scientific viewpoint. If you deny such anxiety for being "unscientific," you will end up being mistrusted. You might as well explain scientific knowledge, but apart from that, you should maintain the stance that you are ready to accept the personalities and lives of other people who come to you.

Q: In your survey of mothers in the city of Fukushima, you asked them what provided moral support as they raised their children. Among the answers, the very presence of their own children fetched the highest score of 3.76 on a scale of four, whereas the central, prefectural and municipal governments got the lowest score of 2.25. What do you have to say about that?

A: Raising your children is not without problems, but the very presence of your children motivates you to pluck up the courage to live on amid anxiety. While we have yet to find out why the central and local governments were given the low ratings, I think their inconsistent remarks and slow response during the early phase of the disaster may have taken a toll.

If you look at how central government officials respond to the Sendai nuclear plant and other issues, their emphasis is always on the need for restarts and safety, and you don't really know how they plan to defend residents from radiation in the event another accident should occur. **They can hardly win the trust of residents unless they demonstrate unambiguously that they are paying attention to the skeptics of nuclear restarts.**

My daily medical practice makes me realize that trust carries enormous weight in our society. The Fukushima nuclear disaster has brought that home to me.

* * *

Born in 1945, Yukihiro Kayama became a professor of neurophysiology with Fukushima Medical University in 1987. He has been professor with Fukushima College since 2011.

Evacuees help to prepare New Year at temple

December 26, 2014

Year-end cleaning at temple in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141226_29.html

Dec. 26, 2014 - Updated 08:33 UTC+1

Evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster have visited a Buddhist temple in an evacuation zone to prepare it for the New Year.

About 20 people gathered at Kotokuin Temple in Naraha Town on Friday.

They wiped altar fittings with cloth and dusted a statue of the Deva King at the main gate with bamboo leaves.

They also placed a 2.5-meter handmade kadomatsu New Year pine tree decoration in front of the gate.

Most parts of Naraha are designated as evacuation zones. But the government allows evacuees to return to their homes from December 24th to January 7th.

Hideo Igari, an evacuee who made the kadomatsu, said he hopes many evacuees will visit the town to see the decoration.

The temple's chief priest, Shuryu Shima, said he is grateful that many evacuees came to help him prepare for the New Year. He added that he prays that evacuees will be able to return home soon.

Govt new measures to boost reconstruction

December 28, 2014

Govt. to speed up reconstruction in Fukushima

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 28, 2014 - Updated 03:16 UTC+1

Japanese government officials are planning to speed up efforts to rebuild areas of Fukushima Prefecture hit by the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The Reconstruction Agency plans to build bases comprising homes and government offices to prepare for the return of evacuees. Agency officials will submit a bill to put the plan in motion to the next Diet session.

It will allow **bigger tax exemptions for sales of land in the town of Okuma** near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The move is expected to boost land sales. Landowners won't have to pay tax on income from sales of land up to about 420,000 dollars.

The bill will also allow business owners to write off reserve funds for capital investment as losses.

No more hot spots but people still wary

December 29, 2014

Last recommended evacuation warning lifted in Fukushima, but many remain wary

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412290040>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--The central government lifted on Dec. 28 the last recommended evacuation advisory for several districts in this city, saying radiation levels from the nuclear accident fell below the annual exposure limit.

However, many of the residents of 152 households within these districts voiced their opposition to the lifting.

The central government designated areas that registered high radiation levels outside the zones under mandatory evacuation orders as specific recommended evacuation spots following the triple meltdown at

the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The residents living within these locales were encouraged to evacuate from their homes.

The districts in Minami-Soma were designated as such because they were at risk of exceeding the annual accumulated dose limit of 20 millisieverts, or 3.8 microsieverts per hour.

The central government in June 2011 issued the advisory for some locales in the cities of Minami-Soma and Date and the village of Kawauchi, all in Fukushima Prefecture, home to 281 households. The advisory for Date and Kawauchi was lifted earlier.

Central government officials explained their latest decision to the residents and local officials, saying that the health risks are not expected because radiation levels in their sites now measure well below the designated limit of 20 millisieverts.

They also presented support measures to encourage the residents to return to their homes.

However, evacuee Katsuji Sato, among the residents of the 152 households, said he would not immediately return home.

The 79-year-old, who lives in temporary housing in Minami-Soma, had lived in a family of six of four generations before the Great East Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, set off the nuclear disaster. Sato's mother died where she evacuated to, and his eldest son, the son's wife and their elementary school child moved to Miyagi Prefecture.

"My wife and I cannot return to our home even though we want to unless decontamination work is undertaken again," Sato said.

December 28, 2014

Govt. ends Minamisoma "hot spot" evacuations

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/japan.html>

Dec. 28, 2014 - Updated 15:48 UTC+1

Japan's government has lifted all evacuation advisories for so-called hot spots with high radiation levels in Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture.

The government lifted the house-by-house evacuation advisories on Sunday because radiation dosage levels in the area have fallen below the benchmark 20 millisieverts per year, thanks to decontamination work.

This follows similar moves in another city and a village 2 years ago in Fukushima Prefecture. All the hot-spot evacuation advisories in the prefecture have now been lifted.

With the lifting, residents of 152 households in Minamisoma city can return to their homes.

But city officials say about 80 percent of the residents will not return due to lingering radiation concerns.

79-year-old Katsuji Sato said he will continue to live in temporary shelter for the time being, since the fields next to his house have not yet been decontaminated.

He said the lifting will not change his life. He said he cannot have his first-grade grandchild visit due to the high levels of radiation surrounding his house.

He said he wants the government to decontaminate the neighboring hot spots in order to create a safe residential environment.

The residents will continue to receive monthly compensation money of 100,000 yen, or about 830 dollars, from Tokyo Electric Power Company until March of next year, for the stress and suffering they have had to endure.

“Yoku Wakaru Hoshasen Kyoshitsu”



"Yoku Wakaru Hoshasen Kyoshitsu," left, and its English version, "Radiation and Health Seminar," contain content from radiation seminars. (Yukiko Seino)

December 29, 2014

Fukushima mothers compile booklet derived from radiation seminars

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412290023>

By YUKIKO SEINO/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Mothers living near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have compiled a booklet offering basic knowledge about radiation and explanations addressing safety concerns arising from the disaster.

The booklet, titled "Yoku Wakaru Hoshasen Kyoshitsu" (Radiation and Health Seminar), is available in both Japanese and English and was created by the Veteran Mothers' Society, which consists of five mothers from the city of Minami-Soma.

The members, some of whom are former high school classmates, decided to create the booklet "for children's sake."

The information incorporates lessons learned from doctors at seminars the group organized following the accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011.

Amid the confusion and fears over radiation after the disaster unfolded, the mothers convened their first seminar for children and guardians in December 2011. They invited Masaharu Tsubokura, a doctor of hematology from the University of Tokyo's Institute of Medical Science who had been providing consultations at the Minami-Soma municipal general hospital.

Other physicians later joined the effort to spread accurate information about radiation, and the mothers have held the sessions once or twice a month.

In the seminars, the children peppered Tsubokura with questions, such as "Can I touch my pets?" and "Is it OK to lick the snow?"

Ikumi Watanabe, the society's 54-year-old vice chairwoman, recalled that Tsubokura's explanations "were spoken in an easy-to-understand manner so the information popped straight into our heads. It was nice that we could talk with him on the same level and in person."

Even now, the nature of the questions has not changed much.

"People have felt pressured not to talk about radiation, and some mothers have finally gotten the information only now, more than three years after the accident," Tsubokura said. "I hope I can help them make decisions without thinking negatively about themselves or losing their self-confidence."

In addition to basic knowledge, such as the differences between external and internal radiation exposure and between becquerels and sieverts, the booklet answers questions like: "Can radiation be transmitted from one person to another?" and "Is the tap water OK?"

According to the Veteran Mothers' Society, 20,000 copies of the Japanese version were distributed to schools, companies and other organizations. The English version has been ordered by international schools, international exchange organizations and other groups.

Inquiries to the Veteran Mothers' Society can be made via email (beteranmama0808@gmail.com).

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